

# Wild 133

30 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

LIFE IN LADAKH, INDIA  
ELUSIVE EMUS ON THE  
YURAYGIR COASTAL WALK  
ARE YOU READY TO  
(LEARN ABOUT) ROCK?  
FOLIO: BUDGIE MURMURATION  
CATHEDRAL MOUNTAIN  
CIRCUIT TRACK NOTES  
PROFILE: ERIC PHILIPS  
BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO  
ROGANING

New Year's Eve  
*on top of Australia*



ISSN 1030-469X



9 771030 469006

JAN-FEB 2013, NO 133  
\$8.95\* INC GST

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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# Wild

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Established 1981

January–February 2013,  
issue 133 \$8.95\*

\* Maximum Australian recommended retail price only

### WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.

*Cover What better way to bring in the New Year than on Kosciuszko?*

Michele Kohout

*Contents An electric storm on the plains of the Gascoyne region in Western Australia.*

**...even with December's decision to ditch the EPBC Act handover, there will still be pushes to get it back into discussions. The door may have closed on the deal, but it's certainly not locked.**

## The State of Federal Environment Powers

The Australian wilderness just dodged a big, fat bullet. With the federal government teetering on the edge of giving states more environmental approval powers – ‘cutting the green tape’ for businesses – Julia Gillard’s announcement that environment minister Tony Burke would keep his current responsibilities was met with a colossal, collective sigh of relief from thousands of environmentalists across the nation and the world.

But what does this mean, really? Is it over? In a word, no. Well, it is, but only for now. The outcry in the lead-up to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Business Advisory Forum in Canberra on 6 December, and the COAG meeting the following day, involved tens of thousands of signatures on petitions, protests, a letter to the PM from the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists and another from 33 United National Environmental Programme Global 500 Laureates – including some of the world’s most high-profile biologists and policy makers – all of which pushed the issue to the forefront of most media outlets.

But the handover plan to transfer some approval powers pertaining to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* from the federal to state governments, which was proposed to come into effect in March, was shelved not only because of public outcry, but because the states weren’t able to formulate a consistent application across the board – with some willing to take on as much as 90 per cent of environmental responsibility and others as little as 25 per cent – and that some of their existing environmental track records aren’t up to speed. The EPBC Act has high standards and not all the states were able to prove or commit to keeping them high.

The EPBC Act protects eight matters of national environmental significance: World

heritage properties, national heritage places, wetlands of international importance, migratory species protected under international agreements, listed threatened species and ecological communities, Commonwealth marine areas, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and nuclear actions.

Federal intervention most famously helped to save the Franklin River in Tasmania’s southwest wilderness in the 1980s. The campaign to ‘Let the Franklin run free’ kick-started Australia’s environmentalist movement and in the three decades since, the federal government has stepped in on matters such as oil rigs in the Great Barrier Reef and the damming of Mary River in Queensland to create the Traveston Crossing Dam. The Traveston Crossing Dam project threatened the endangered Mary River Turtle and Mary River Cod.

Under the current conditions, Minister Burke is able to veto an agreement, even if it’s approved at state level. A recent example of this was his intervention in the high country grazing trial early in 2012. Cattle tear up and destroy the delicate habitats that evolved over millennia without hooved animals. And even though the Baillieu government suggested it be a ‘scientific’ trial, Minister Burke quickly stepped in. The Baillieu government is challenging his decision in the courts.

In a similar vein, Minister Burke is currently investigating the possibility of overruling the reintroduction of cattle grazing in Millewa National Park in NSW – also deemed ‘scientific’ by the state government. Unfortunately, given the Victorian alpine country is a national heritage site and Millewa is not, he is unsure if he has sufficient power to intervene. Millewa is, however, part of the Barmah-Millewa Important Bird Area, which has been identified by BirdLife International as such for its significance for the conservation of a

range of species. It is a 263 500-hectare triangular tract of land straddling the Murray that contains Australia’s largest remaining river red gum forest and supports the endangered Australasian bittern, the vulnerable Superb Parrot, and the near threatened Diamond Firetail.

The federal measure of last resort is invaluable to us. We’re lucky to have substantial environment policies in place. While they can always be improved, there are immeasurable differences between us and nations where the wilderness doesn’t just take a back seat, but isn’t even in the vehicle. Selling off natural spaces for money, even for short term profit that leaves the land unusable afterwards, is sadly common practice where governments simply need the cash.

But even with December’s decision to ditch the EPBC Act handover, there will still be pushes to get it back into discussions. The door may have closed on the deal, but it’s certainly not locked.

In the (admittedly unlikely) event that the states get their acts together and agree on a consistent level of environmental control, the issue will arise again. In addition, the fact that there was a bit of compromise on the federal government end has been lost in the initial relief. It will introduce legislation to decrease environmental approval time for big projects and identify categories of projects that won’t need federal approval at all. It’s something to keep an eye on these coming months.

**Belinda Smith**  
belinda.smith@primecreative.com.au

If you’re interested in reading more about the environmental assessments underway, you can see a current list of projects at [www.environment.gov.au/epbc/key-assessments.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/key-assessments.html)



# Wild

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

**Publisher** John Murphy, Prime Creative Media

**Editor** Belinda Smith belinda.smith@primecreative.com.au

**Contributors** Yoav Daniel Bar-Ness, James Bogg, Suzanne Bogg, Bob Brown, Andy Burton, David Bryant, Dave Cauldwell, John Cantor, Chester Andrew Davison, Craig Fardell, Aaron Flanagan, Michele Kohout, Joel Mackay, Steven Pearce, Steve Van Dyck, Cam Walker

**Advertising & Sales** Gayle Shapcott gayle.shapcott@primecreative.com.au

**Group Sales Manager** Brad Buchanan

**Production & Advertising Coordinator**

Michelle Weston michelle.weston@primecreative.com.au

**Administration Manager**

Hayley Blair hayley.blair@primecreative.com.au

**Subscriptions** Gordon Watson subscriptions@primecreative.com.au

**Accounts** Brooke Radis accounts@primecreative.com.au

**Design & Production** Joel Park, Blake Storey, Alice Ewen,

Michelle Weston, Karen Sloane, Sarah Doyle

**Additional Design** Paul Piaia

**Consultant** Brian Walters SC

**Special Advisers**

Stephen Banton, John Chapman, Andrew Cox,

Grant Dixon, Geoff Law, Glenn van der Knijff

**Founder** Chris Baxter OAM

**Publisher** Prime Creative Media

ABN 51 127 239 212

**Printing** Brougham Press

**Distribution** Gordon & Gotch Australia Pty Ltd

**Subscription** rates are currently \$47.95 for one year (six issues), \$89 for two years, or \$125 for three years, to addresses in Australia. For overseas addresses, the rates are \$85, \$165, and \$235, respectively. When moving, advise us immediately of your new and old addresses to avoid lost or delayed copies.

**Advertising** rates are available on request.

Copy deadlines (advertising and editorial): 11 November, 14 January, 11 March, 14 May, 16 July, 16 September.  
See below for publication dates.

**Contributions**, preferably well illustrated with photographs, are welcome. Contributors' guidelines are available at [wild.com.au](http://wild.com.au). Written submissions should be supplied by email. Please ensure that submissions are accompanied by an envelope and sufficient postage. Names and addresses should be written on manuscripts and photos. While every care is taken, no responsibility is accepted for material submitted. Articles represent the views of the authors, and not necessarily those of the publisher.

**All correspondence to:**

Prime Creative Media

11-18 Buckhurst St

South Melbourne VIC 3205 Australia.

**Phone** (03) 9690 8766

**Fax** (03) 9682 0044

**Email** belinda.smith@primecreative.com.au

**Website** [wild.com.au](http://wild.com.au)

Wild is published bi-monthly at the end of the month before cover date (cover dates: January–February, March–April, May–June, July–August, September–October, November–December) by Prime Creative Media. The Wild logo (ISSN 1030-469X) is registered as a trademark, and the use of the name is prohibited. All material copyright 2012 Prime Creative Media. All rights reserved. No part of the contents of this publication may be reproduced without first obtaining the written consent of the publisher. Wild attempts to verify advertising, track notes, route descriptions, maps and other information, but cannot be held responsible for erroneous, incomplete or misleading material.

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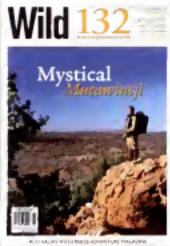
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Issue 132, Nov-Dec 2012

**CHANCE MEETINGS**

I remember well the conversation with Hugh & Kim de Kreter on the saddle below Mt Clear (*Wild* no 132), and it's amazing how these chance meetings can influence the directions your life takes. One of the (many) walks we talked about was the NZ South Island classic Young-Wilkins-Matukituki via Rabbit Pass. This was a walk I'd always aspired to but, alas, so far hadn't achieved. Hugh and Kim, having both completed it, provided good information on the various obstacles. So March this year found me on a bus to Wanaka and not much later I was ploughing across the Makarora River towards the Young Valley. Days later, forewarned by Hugh & Kim, I pushed past cosy Top Forks Hut to camp below the Waterfall Face in order to shorten the next already lengthy day. Mostly walking alone, another chance meeting saw me latch on to a group of fit, young Aussies and together, as Team Rabbit, we pushed up the face, over the pass, and down the gnarly descent gorge to the East Matukituki. As it must, the rain came and the final day turned into a fitting ten-hour sodden epic, yet the after-thrill, once warm and dry back in Wanaka, was immensely satisfying. With my newfound friends, we hired a car and went off in search of other adventures in the Darrans, all thanks to an entertaining evening in a humble saddle under Mt Clear.

**Steve Waters**  
Fitzroy North, VIC

**ROGAINING RESPECT**

What a shame that with the excitement of the Olympic Games, Australia's fantastic accomplishments in the World Rogaining Championship were overlooked by most media outlets. The article in the last issue (*Info*, *Wild* no 132) was a deserved testament to the competitors who went over. We scored two gold, two silver, and two bronze medals in the one event! What an incredible feat.

Just a question – is that a four-pack of Czech beer in Julie Quinn's hand on the podium?

With that kind of incentive, no wonder the Aussies did so well!

**Sean Tilley**  
Fairfield West, NSW

**SOCK DRYING TIP #2**

There is an older, nastier method of drying soggy socks. Back in the 1960s, before plastic supermarket bags had been invented, I was a geology student sent off to the Swiss Alps to hit rocks for a couple of months. Our leaky base camp was in a peat bog well above the tree line; hence no chance of a campfire. It rained a lot that summer, sometimes for days on end, and wet clothes were standard. We found that if you put the wet socks under your sleeping bag at night and wore a beanie to bed, you could sleep quite comfortably in a damp sleeping bag and the whole lot would be dry in the morning. The flip side was that we ended up with Trench Foot. However, it wasn't all miserable – the mountain scenery in the Aiguilles Rouges Massif was outstanding!

**Martin Norwick**  
Hawthorn East, VIC

**SCRUB TURKEYS? NOT ANY MORE, THANKS**

Steve Van Dyck's article about scrub turkeys (*Nature of the Beast*, *Wild* no 132) put a smile on my face. I feel I might be one of those people he wrote about who post their scrub turkey stories online. An ex-Brisbanite of the outer 'burbs, I routinely cleaned up after those dastardly birds. At one point, a particularly persistent beast of a thing tore up our front yard to make a mound, but of course, any attempts to move the mulch back to its rightful place – around the shrubs next to my lawn – meant that the damn thing just reconstructed its mound overnight, doing more damage as it went. We even got a dog, but our poor animal seemed to be intimidated by the apparently fearless bird as it strutted around our place like a king.

A couple of years ago, we moved to Adelaide. Here, we don't have to worry about any wayward birds claiming our home as theirs. However, on a recent first-time visit to Kangaroo Island, imagine my surprise when one of those scrub turkeys nonchalantly came strolling towards me!

Seems as though they were introduced in the 1930s and have made the island their happy home. Seems you can't escape the bloody things, no matter how far south you move.

**Jan Abbott**  
Adelaide, SA

**BUSHWALKING TIP**

I dehydrate my own meals and seal them in a vacuum-sealed bag. I then add water to the food in the bag, and after rehydrating I boil it in the bag to heat it up. This means no worries about food sticking to the pot and burning, and no pot to wash up. I've taken it further now by doing the reheating in a kettle and taking no other pots. When just boiling water, the kettle is more efficient and easier to pour, a double advantage. The important thing is to ensure the bag the food is placed in is food safe for boiling or steaming in a bag. Clip lock bags are not recommended for this.

**Tim Jones**  
Lenah Valley, TAS



For his tip, Tim wins a Deuter Exosphere sleeping bag, worth \$2,890.00. The Exosphere is filled with Thermo ProLoft to keep you warm and has water-repellent areas at the head, sides and feet to keep you dry. Elastic chamber seams allow up to 25 per cent stretch, giving you a comfortable sleep.

**Reader's letters and tips** are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of fewer than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to *Wild*, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, Vic 3026 or email [belinda.smith@primecreative.com.au](mailto:belinda.smith@primecreative.com.au)



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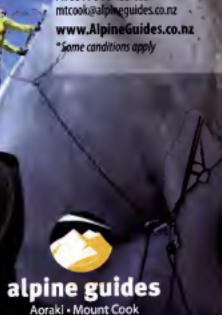
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The Top End wet season is spectacular and, more importantly, enjoyable. This is, in many ways, my favourite time of year. This trip is a combination of some of the short wet season walks that I most enjoy doing myself.

I enjoy them all so much that I'll run the trip for as few as two people at no extra charge. I've designed it to allow participants plenty of time to acclimatise as we work our way from day walks up to longer overnights.

If you have ever wondered what our wet season is really like, you owe it to yourself to have a look at our trip notes.

Russell Willis

12 Carrington St Millner NT 0810 [rrwillis@internode.on.net](mailto:rrwillis@internode.on.net)

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# Admirals Arch



**Photographer Garry Hulme writes:** This photo of Admirals Arch on Kangaroo Island was taken with a Nikon Coolpix P500. My wife and I were staying in one of the Cape du Couedic lighthouse keepers' cabins in September and I decided to go down to the Arch around sunset. The day's squalls and rainclouds cleared on cue for this picture.



By submitting a Wild Shot you can win a fantastic camera bag and accessory pack from Lowepro worth \$489. For tips and tricks, check out [wild.com.au/reviews/item/lowepro](http://wild.com.au/reviews/item/lowepro)

To be eligible for the prize, send your image to [belinda.smith@primecreative.com.au](mailto:belinda.smith@primecreative.com.au)

We are after any outdoor shots that are humorous, inspiring, spectacular, or all three.



# Wild Writers

**Don't forget to get out and about – and win great prizes!**

THE WEATHER IS GETTING NICER, and with school holidays upon us, there's no better time to get children into the wilderness and reflecting on their experience with Wild Writers.

The competition encourages children to develop their writing skills while appreciating the outdoors. The topic is *My Wilderness Experience*. Entries close Friday 29 March 2013 and can be in any written form fewer than 750 words. Wild requests that teachers, Guide and Scout leaders – anyone, really – enter selected works to Wild Writers. Sea to Summit will supply prizes to first, second and third placegetters in the following age groups: Grades 5 and 6; Years 7 and 8; Years 9 and 10; and Years 11 and

12. The judging panel comprises writers and adventurers.

Winners and some finalists will also be published in Wild magazine and on the Wild website.

Category winners will receive a fantastic Traverse XT1 sleeping bag worth \$599.95, second placegetters will win a Black Diamond daypack worth \$129.95, and third placegetters take home an X-Series three-piece set worth \$59.95. All prizes are generously supplied by Sea to Summit.

For guidelines and announcements, please see [www.wild.com.au/wildwriters](http://www.wild.com.au/wildwriters)

Who knows – you may be the parent, teacher or leader of the next generation of Wild contributors!



## Adventure Travel Film Festival returns in 2013

Following a successful maiden run in 2012, the Adventure Travel Film Festival is on again this year in Bright, Victoria from 15 to 17 February.

The festival will be brimming with inspirational talks, workshops and social events featuring celebrated local and international adventurers, covering everything from bushwalking to kayaking, climbing, cycling, long-distance horse-riding and much more.

Against the scenic backdrop of Victoria's Great Alpine Valleys, there'll be screenings of some of the best adventure travel films ever made, as well as a host of big names from the adventuring world – including Australian travel legend Mal Leyland, plus Jon Muir, Eric Philips (profiled on page 22), Pat Farmer, Kate Leeming, Beau Miles, and Graeme Joy, who will wow the crowds with their amazing endeavours. Experts including AdventurePro Australia/NZ's co-founder Colin Kneebone will be on hand to give advice and encouragement to budding outdoor/adventure filmmakers. Weekend (\$75) and day passes (\$50) are available to buy now at: [www.trybooking.com/Booking/BookingEventSummary.aspx?eid=33840](http://www.trybooking.com/Booking/BookingEventSummary.aspx?eid=33840)



## SCROGGIN

### Three Capes Track opens – well, the first bit anyway

The long-awaited first segment of Tasmania's Three Capes Track opened in October, officially allowing the public to see the initial part of the \$25.3 million project. The ribbon-cutting ceremony by Economic Development Minister David O'Byrne, Federal Infrastructure Minister Anthony Albanese, Tasman Council mayor Jan Barwick, Lyons MP Dick Adams and Federal Treasurer Wayne Swan marks the end of the first phase of

the project, which is jointly funded by the federal and Tasmanian governments.

### Thredbo Valley Track is on its way to completion

It must be ribbon-cutting season: Three new suspension bridges have been opened for walkers and riders who wish to explore the Thredbo Valley Track in Kosciuszko National Park. The bridges span the Thredbo River and around seven kilometres of the Thredbo Valley Track is already open. Once finished, 17 kilometres of track will give walkers and riders a chance to experience the sub-alpine environment, and at least one

part of the new shared-use track will be suitable for wheelchairs or people with lower mobility.

### Cascades campsite in Wadbilliga reopens

Closed after heavy storms in 2011, the Cascades campsite in Wadbilliga National Park – also home to the largest known concentration of Greater Gliders in Australia – is open for summer. However, campsites will be limited to protect the habitat trees of Greater Gliders. Further improvement works at Cascades, such as new toilets, will be undertaken by NPWS during 2013.



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# Fire Danger Ratings and Total Fire Bans



**AUSTRALIAN SUMMERS** and bushfires go hand in hand. Much of our native vegetation relies on hot fires to burst seedpods and allow regrowth, and oil-laden eucalypts covered with tinder-dry bark make for beautifully combustible material. And while many fires are started by lightning strikes, Fire Danger Ratings and Total Fire Bans help reduce potentially life-threatening situations – including for bushwalkers. But what are the differences between Fire Danger Ratings and Total Fire Bans?

Fire Danger Ratings predict how a fire will behave and the difficulty putting it out, should one start. These are rated from low-moderate all the way to catastrophic or code red, depending on your state or territory of residence. Usually, the Bureau of Meteorology issues Fire Weather Warnings within 24 hours

of the relevant period, and these warnings go to media outlets, fire agencies and other emergency services. The bureau-issued warnings include information such as the forecast conditions (temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and dampness of vegetation and soil), affected areas, and the time period of the warning. Some fire agencies, such as the Tasmania Fire Service and the Country Fire Authority in Victoria, use the Bureau's forecast to give danger ratings three or four days in advance.

Total Fire Bans come from state and territory-based fire agencies, not the Bureau of Meteorology. However, the Bureau issues Total Fire Ban Advisories in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory to help convey the information. Total Fire Bans are established the day before

## Find out more:

Bureau of Meteorology  
[www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)

ACT Fire & Rescue  
[esa.act.gov.au/actfr](http://esa.act.gov.au/actfr)

Country Fire Authority (Victoria)  
[www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)

Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia  
[www.efs.wa.gov.au](http://www.efs.wa.gov.au)

Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service  
[www.pfs.nt.gov.au/Fire-and-Rescue.aspx](http://www.pfs.nt.gov.au/Fire-and-Rescue.aspx)

NSW Rural Fire Service  
[www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service  
[www.fire.qld.gov.au](http://www.fire.qld.gov.au)

South Australian Country Fire Service  
[www.cfs.sa.gov.au](http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au)

Tasmania Fire Service  
[www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au)

to ensure the greatest accuracy possible as they legally restrict what can and can't take place in a whole district.

If, like us, you intend to go interstate these holidays, check the relevant websites for local fire information. Parks agencies also have information on solid fuel bans, where only gas-powered or electric cookers can be used.

January	Sydney Trail Series - Manly Beyond The Black Stump BR	Outlaw Padding Crit - Race 3 P Dem Race 2 BR	Perth Trail Series 3 - Snakes n Ladders BR	Perth Trail Series 4 - QI Gong BR
1 Jan, NSW <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	13 Jan, NSW <a href="http://coolrunning.com.au">coolrunning.com.au</a>	31 Jan, VIC <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	10 Feb, WA <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	24 Feb, WA <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>
Bogong to Hotham - Rooftop Run BR	Two Bays Trail Run BR	Canoe Sprint Grand Prix 2 C	Sydney Trail Series - Manly Dem Race 3 BR	Running Wild S3 #6: Sun Valley BR
6 Jan, VIC <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	13 Jan, VIC <a href="http://coolrunning.com.au">coolrunning.com.au</a>	1-3 Feb, VIC <a href="http://canoe.org.au">canoe.org.au</a>	10 Feb, NSW <a href="http://coolrunning.com.au">coolrunning.com.au</a>	24 Feb, NSW <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>
WA Marathon #3 The Claisebrook Race C	Bells Bash BR	2012 Cradle Mountain Run BR	Kayak Kapers P	Warburton Up and Running BR
6 Jan, WA <a href="http://canoe.org.au">canoe.org.au</a>	16 Jan, VIC <a href="http://coolrunning.com.au">coolrunning.com.au</a>	2 Feb, TAS <a href="http://adventurerace.com.eu">adventurerace.com.eu</a>	16 Feb, QLD <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	24 Feb, VIC <a href="http://coolrunning.com.au">coolrunning.com.au</a>
WA Marathon #3 The Claisebrook Race C	Running Wild S3 #5: Knapsack 3hr/6hr Race BR	Kathmandu Adventure Series M	Poker Run BR	Outlaw Padding Crit - Race 4 P
6 Jan, WA <a href="http://canoe.org.au">canoe.org.au</a>	26 Jan, NSW <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	2 Feb, NSW <a href="http://adventurerace.com.eu">adventurerace.com.eu</a>	18 Feb, QLD <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	28 Feb, VIC <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>
Canoe SA Regatta 4 - Canoe/Kayak Sprint C	QLD Sprint Championships C	Pacific Ocean Series - Latitude 28 P	Battle of Barwon Heads P	
12 Jan, SA <a href="http://cenoe.org.au">cenoe.org.au</a>	26-27 Jan, QLD <a href="http://cenoe.org.au">cenoe.org.au</a>	2 Feb, QLD <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	17 Feb, VIC <a href="http://adventurerace.com.eu">adventurerace.com.eu</a>	
NSW Sprint Championships C	Summer Series Round 3 - Adelaide Invitational C	The Gresma Long Memorial Paddle P	Canberra Adventure Race M	
12-13 Jan, NSW <a href="http://canoe.org.eu">canoe.org.eu</a>	26-27 Jan, SA <a href="http://canoe.org.au">canoe.org.au</a>	2 Feb, VIC <a href="http://adventurerace.com.eu">adventurerace.com.eu</a>	23 Feb, ACT <a href="http://coolrunning.com.au">coolrunning.com.au</a>	
33rd Thredbo National Running Week BR	Perth Trail Series 2 - Walligrantr BR	Delalite Dash BR	Dirty 30 Sweaty 60 Mud Run BR	
12-19 Jan, NSW <a href="http://coolrunning.com.au">coolrunning.com.au</a>	27 Jan, WA <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	3 Feb, VIC <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	23 Feb, QLD <a href="http://adventurerace.com.eu">adventurerace.com.eu</a>	
Hares & Hounds Trail Run BR	Summer Splashdown BR	Mt Glorious Mountain Trails BR	iAdventure Sprint Adventure Race M	
13 Jan, QLD <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	27 Jan, WA <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	9 Feb, QLD <a href="http://adventurerace.com.eu">adventurerace.com.eu</a>	23 Feb, ACT <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>	
Perth Trail Series 1 - Stay Puff BR	Kings of the Send BR			
13 Jan, WA <a href="http://adventurerace.com.eu">adventurerace.com.eu</a>	27 Jan, WA <a href="http://adventurerace.com.au">adventurerace.com.au</a>			

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# Southern Angle-headed Dragon *Hypsilurus spinipes*

**W**hen we think of dragons, we might imagine the mythical dragons depicted in popular culture – the fire-breathing beasts feared by medieval society and slain by armoured knights. However, in Australia, some lizards are also commonly known as dragons – those from the family Agamidae, which, in Australia, include 73 species within 14 genera.

Most Australian agamids are outback dwellers, but two species, both members of the genus *Hypsilurus*, have, unusually, packed their corked hats and RM Williams kit away, and left the arid zones for the closed canopy rainforests and adjacent wet forests of eastern Australia. These species, the most recent group of dragons to colonise Australia, migrated here from Papua New Guinea, where other members of the genus *Hypsilurus*, commonly referred to as forest dragons, still persist. One of these species is the Southern Angle-headed Dragon, *Hypsilurus spinipes*.

The Southern Angle-headed Dragon has a maximum total length of about 35 centimetres, with its tail accounting for more than half of this length. It is variable in coloration, described as being grey to chocolate brown on the top of its body, often suffused with green and with variable flecks, mottling and banding, while its underside ranges from white to dirty brown. It has a spined crest on the back of its neck, and, as its name suggests, it has a distinctive angular head.

The other forest dwelling *Hypsilurus* in Australia is the Boyd's Forest Dragon; however, it differs from the Southern Angle-headed Dragon in where it is found. Boyd's Forest Dragon is restricted to the southern east coast of Cape York, while the Southern Angle-headed Dragon's range extends from northeast NSW to southeast Queensland. Both species appear similar, with distinct spined crests on the back of their necks continuous with less pronounced dorsal crests. Boyd's Forest Dragon, however, has a distinct longitudinal row of enlarged spines on the throat, similar to that on its neck, while the Southern Angle-headed Dragon does not.

As a forest dweller, the Southern Angle-headed Dragon has some particular



Photographer Craig Fardell says: I took this photo as we were bush-bashing up a small gully at the end of a walk/raft day trip on the Bobo River, west of Coffs Harbour, on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. When we first spotted this Southern Angle-headed Dragon he had pressed himself up against a rock in such a weird position I thought he might be dead. As I got closer, he jumped from the rock into the leaf litter and sat there without moving a muscle. His camouflage was perfect.

behavioural traits. While we commonly think of lizards basking on rocks, the closed canopy forests provide little opportunity for basking in its warmth, and studies on the Southern Angle-headed Dragon have revealed that it shows little overt thermoregulatory behaviour. The sun's warmth is, however, required to help incubate their eggs, which are laid in shallow nests on the forest floor in open clearings, and can result in the dragons gathering at these open patches or even roadside verges during breeding times.

The Southern Angle-headed Dragon is well camouflaged for forest life, and commonly spends its time positioned vertically on tree trunks, awaiting unsuspecting prey in the form of arthropods such as insects and spiders. Its camouflage also provides the dragon with protection from predators. However, if

disturbed, the dragon will typically edge its way around to the opposite side of the trunk from the perceived threat, removing itself from sight. This is likely a tactic to reduce energy wastage in an environment where it is hard to get warmth into their body.

The arboreal nature of the Southern Angle-headed Dragon makes it an unusual example of an Australian dragon. Perhaps seeing one of these lizards in the wild may be the motivation required for your next foray into our forests.

David Bryant

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# SA Marine Parks network



**The leafy seadragon's habitat is protected, thanks to new marine parks.**

IT'S OFFICIAL. The South Australian government announced the completion of the SA Marine Parks Network on 28 November 2012.

The network of 19 marine parks, which include six sanctuary zones (the equivalent of national parks on land), covers more than 2 665 500 hectares or 44 per cent of the state's ocean. Species such as the southern right whale, leafy seadragon (also the marine emblem of South

Australia), great white shark and little penguin will benefit from protection of their habitats and nursery sites.

The parks have been designed to avoid jetties, boat ramps and recreational fishing and swimming spots, but commercial fishing will be affected by the parks' boundaries. The government has allowed two years for fishing restrictions to come into effect.

## Science snippets

CUCKOOS BEWARE – fairy-wrens are on to your tricks. As well as displaying gorgeous splashes of blue, superb fairy-wrens teach their progeny a password – a unique note – that needs to be imparted before they get fed. What makes this particularly interesting, however, is mother fairy-wrens teach the password while the chick is still in the egg. They also teach their mate the password by singing it to them away from the nest. If the nestlings don't emit the password note, the parents fly off and start a new nest elsewhere. doi: 10.1016/j.cuk.2012.09.025

Fossilised remains have provided a clue to the ancestry of modern great white sharks, linking them to broad-toothed mako sharks rather than megatooth sharks. Found in Peru, the jaws, teeth and vertebrae of *Carcharodon hubbelli*, an intermediate form of the shark – like our ‘missing link’ – has been dated 6.5 million years old and could help palaeontologists better understand other marine and terrestrial fossils.

doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4983.2012.01201.x

Readers may be familiar with the giant fire-dependent eucalypts of Tasmania and east Victoria – some of which rival the massive Californian

redwoods – but new research may save them from the loggers’ saw. Old growth giant eucalypts have huge value to the timber industry, but a team from the University of Tasmania’s School of Plant Science suggests they be reclassified as rainforest trees. This reclassification would support arguments for conservation. Mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is one of the tallest tree species in the world and the tallest flowering plant. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8137.2012.04359.x

A study of coral from the Great Barrier Reef has discovered a massive coral collapse in the Palm Islands occurred just after development on the nearby mainland, despite the coral previously surviving centuries of flood and cyclones. Researchers from the University of Queensland found increased levels of mud and nutrients in the Great Barrier Reef lagoon, as a result of land clearing for agriculture and grazing, coincided with the destruction of branching corals from 1920 to 1955, showing there’s a strong link between terrestrial development and the health of our corals. doi: 10.1098/rph.2012.2100

It may seem obvious, but fish that have grown up in marine reserves are more complacent – and

therefore more killable – than their open ocean counterparts. This might not be bad for the fish population, though – spear gun fishermen may be more willing to respect the boundaries of marine reserves if they hunt around the periphery, where the naïve fish can wander. The Australian researchers established a ‘naïveté radius’ of at least 150 metres from the Philippine marine reserve boundary in the study.

doi: 10.1111/el.12028



**The Murray-Darling Basin Plan has been signed into law**

## WOODCHIPS

Two years after the much-debated draft plan was released, the Murray-Darling Basin Plan has been signed into law, with federal Water Minister Tony Burke saying, ‘It’s a century too late, but better late than never’. At the time of print, two attempts to overturn the plan – one by Nationals MP Michael McCormack and the other by Australian Party MP Bob Katter – were defeated in the lower house, and the High Court of Australia rejected a constitutional challenge by a group of irrigators.

A 30-year battle over Tasmania’s forests was ended with a peace deal signed at the end of November between timber and environmental groups. More than half a million hectares of the state’s forest will be reserved and the amount of sawlogs available for loggers will be reduced to about 140 000 cubic metres.



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# Wandering the West Coast Range

**Bob Brown finds the simple things are often the best**



THE PLUNGE POOLS on Mt Darwin took us by surprise.

After two days at Kelly Basin in the northeast corner of Macquarie Harbour, we spent a night camped on the white quartz gravel of Lake Burbury's bathing before climbing Mt Darwin. That bathing was the end of a beautiful idea. Let me explain. Since the campaign to save the Franklin River succeeded 30 years ago, I had wondered why there is not a publicised walk along the West Coast Range in Tasmania. The range runs 60 kilometres north to south from Mt Murchison (1278 m) to Mt Darwin (1033 m).

My interest lay in the half of the range south of the Gormanston saddle, that mesmerising point on the Lyell Highway from Hobart where Queenstown first comes into view, far below. With its rainforests fed into the furnaces last century and the prevailing winds carrying sulphuric acid from the chimneys of



**The view from the top of Darwin was quite wonderful. To the south, large cruise boats entering and leaving the mouth of the Gordon River from Macquarie Harbour were distant specks.**

Queenstown's copper smelters to debride what was left of its vegetation, the West Coast Range was left looking like a moonscape.

Then, in the rebound to the Hawke government's successful High Court challenge to the Franklin Dam in 1983, the Tasmanian parliament (myself, then a lower house MP, excepted) voted to dam the adjacent King River where its gorge cuts through the West Coast Range. This created Lake Burbury, now a popular boating and trout fishing venue for West Coasters.

The lake's fluctuating levels have washed out a convoluted shoreline of eye-snatching white gravel up to 100 metres wide. So, while the

views from the top of the range are expansive, that white Lake Burbury bathing now dominates and mars the lot.

Never mind. The West Coast has a lot more to offer.

In 2012, we sorted out those offerings of the southern half of the West Coast Range, beginning with the day's outing from Gormanston to the top of Mt Owen (1142 m), which looks down the main street of Queenstown to the west. We scampered down to the deep blue glacial lake in Owen's eastern lee. There is a mysterious old European statue by the lake, an amalgam of male and female symbols.



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We next drove south from Queenstown and within an hour were parked by the Bird River and walking through lovely forest to Kelly Basin in the northwest corner of Macquarie Harbour in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. A century ago this Bird River walk was a bustling railway and the Basin boasted 1000 residents in the twin townships of Pullinger and Pullinger West complete with schools, shops, pubs, wharves and railway station.

Now the rainforest is back in control, but there are remnant rock walls, pits, iron bedstead pieces, and wharf stumps jutting into the harbour. There are also swans, cormorants and ducks in the bays. On a hillside to the west is a single stem of the slender tree fern *Cyathus cunninghamii* thought, until we came across this fine specimen, to be extinct in the region.

After two idyllic nights and days at Kelly Basin, we drove back north and camped at the Darwin Dam which, mercifully, stops Lake Burbury from spilling the King River waters down the Andrew River and into the Franklin. We rose early and set off for Mt Darwin.

Without good directions, the track up via Snake Peak is easily missed. We missed it. After some serious scrub-bashing, we broke out on to an ancient pack track, which is beautifully aligned to take the walker up to the plateau between Snake Peak and Mt Darwin.

We decided to ascend the northwest corner of the mountain and enjoyed a rock scramble on a very hot January morning. On my part, there were some palpitations, chest tightness and a successful bid to have my good companion carry my backpack.

The view from the top of Darwin was quite wonderful. To the south, large cruise boats entering and leaving the mouth of the Gordon River from Macquarie Harbour were distant specks. To the east, the skyline was dominated by the great dome of Frenchmans Cap (1446 m). Just ten kilometres north rose the noble top of Mt Jukes (1168 m).

Immediately west rose the rock-top hulk of Mt Sorrell (1143 m). A walk across Slate Spur to this impressive peak (a fine King Billy Pine forest is said to grace its ramparts) and then down to Macquarie Harbour is sure to reward other adventurers.

We descended via the ridge east of Allans Creek and crossed to its bed just above its waterfall and ravine. That is where we were delighted, in the now scorching heat of the afternoon, to find a series of deep, cold plunge pools carved into the rock. Into these we plunged.

Back at Queenstown the weather forecast was routine West Coast Rain. So we booked on the Wilderness Railway to Strahan and, next day, enjoyed a wine-and-cheese outing through the swirling mists of the intact lower King River Gorge. Try this railway on a wet day; the atmospherics are splendid.

Next day, capitalising again on the rain, we walked into the magnificent 104-metre-high Montezuma Falls north of Queenstown.

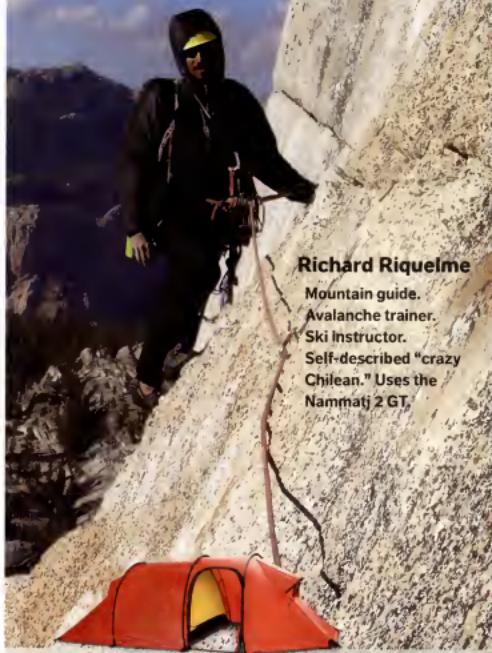
On the way home I thought of the coming hot bath which, for all of its joys, could not compare with those unexpected but revitalising plunge pools on Mt Darwin.

*Rainforest back: along the Bird River track to Kelly Basin.*



For more from Dr Bob Brown, see [www.bobbrown.org.au](http://www.bobbrown.org.au)

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# Gait Ways

The instability of the track can give clarity to life, writes Quentin Chester



**A**s the Stuart Highway rolls north from Port Augusta it carries you ever deeper into the outback. For hour after hour it's mulga scrub and saltbush. Then come stretches of gibber flats and salt lakes dissolving into the horizon. If you're not accustomed to these sun-crunched surfaces the effect can be disconcerting. Adding to the confusion, the map indicates the highway follows the Stuart Range. Yet there's not a spur or summit in sight, unless you count the little peaks of rubble left by opal miners.

However, a few minutes beyond Coober Pedy is a turn off to The Breakaways. This side road leads to the edge of a brittle escarpment. Everywhere you look there are stark mesa-style hills and flat-topped headlands. Gullies drop steeply to an empty plain that yawns open to the east, all of which drives home the fact that the Stuart Range is not a ridgey didge range but one of those plateau-style uplands.

For many Highway 87 commuters, The Breakaways is also a handy detour; a place for a breather or quick cliff-top picnic. It's a lookout that's become a landmark. Apart from a few straggly bushes, what grabs the eye is colour: chalky whites, pale yellow and outcrops in lurid orange. Come sundown the place flares with fiery hues, at which point anyone with a camera is going for it.

No surprise then that these views bob up in books and postcards. Every few months the hills feature as a weather photo on the telly. They've even starred in movies, including *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*. Year by year we've converted The Breakaways into a

visual cipher, a ready-made backdrop when blush of showy outback colour is required. It's geography as decor. And that's pretty much how I thought about the place. Until, that is, I did something I hadn't done on previous visits: I took a hike.

The Breakaways have no proper trails as such. However, here and there, you see faint tracks like animal pads. I took one that dropped off the rim and within a couple of strides the place looked different. The steepness of the ground and the loose crumble of gravel underfoot puts you on edge. Suddenly, you're teetering.

In this precarious mode, the sensations of terrain sharpen. The powdery grain of the earth. Bushes sprouting sideways out of the rubble. The sight of the escarpment at eye level with the light flicking back in your face. Most of all, the instability of the slope. On foot you don't need to imagine the effect of kangaroos trundling downhill or erosive runoff from a bucketing downpour – your every step is like a re-enactment.

A deceptively complex ploy, this walking manoeuvre. Who'd have thought mincing down a desert ridge could change the sense of place so much? It's not just finding another angle of view. There's also a kind of knowing that only comes after meeting landscape when you're on the hoof. Our noticing cranks up a gear. It's as if in a plodding, pedestrian way we locate a texture to reality that's not accessible by any other means.

It might be the bleedin' obvious but this intuition has still managed to catch me out in all sorts of places. I'd probably looked over Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains half a dozen times before I finally took the plunge. There's something irreplaceable about fathoming on foot the depths of the falls. To travel the giddy steps at Rocky Point and feel the wind-borne spray off the cascades; to hear cockatoo cries echoing across the walls and dip momentarily into the forested gulf of the Jamison Valley is to apprehend information no film crew can render.

It was the same story on Fraser Island. My first hour on the island was spent driving. You could argue that steering a vehicle along loose, deeply rutted tracks gives you some kind of feeling for the sandy essence of the place. But that's nothing compared to stepping deep into the inland forests or arriving suddenly at one of the hidden

perched lakes or lunging headlong down a steep coastal sand-blown.

Clearly, you don't need to be at a World Heritage park to benefit from a taking stroll. But even at sites where walking is the only effective means to appreciate what it's all about, it's baffling to see so many visitors who never leave their cars, or the ones lured into imagining that the best way to engage these places is by helicopter or through a resort's picture window.

For a century or so the power of walking as a mode of transport has been in decline. It's considered slow, unglamorous stuff. Not just that, but it's also assumed that there's nothing to learn – or experience – from a walk that can't be just as easily picked up at speed in a car or some other form of conveyance. Such is the fetish for pre-processed facts that our culture also tends to value info gleaned from books, glossy pics and Wikipedia as somehow more worthy than anything we discover first hand.

Thus, over time, walking is increasingly neglected as a primary path to knowing the world. Instead, it's seen as an 'activity'. What was once an instinctive, universal response to circumstance has become curiosity, a quaint pastime for power walkers, dog-owners and wilderness scruffs like me.

After less than an hour wandering The Breakaways I became unmooored. Not just out of sight, the world of car parks and four-wheel drives trailing dust plumes seemed suddenly removed. I gave in to the weathered slopes of the Stuart Range. Below the outcrops these aprons of bare dirt and gravel were creased with watercourses like rucked folds of fabric. Every colourful dip and rise wore a contrasting texture, while the creeklines were flagged with lines of spiky acacia, saltbush and blue-grey daisy bush.

It was breathless landscape. In the mid-afternoon glare, life appeared to be on hold. Come dusk, creatures would doubtless emerge. At that moment however the emptiness of the stony plains felt inviolate. Into the space created by my short outing came memories of the Arkaroola Hills and other ambling visits in scattered corners of the Great Artesian Basin. The act of walking called up country.

The Breakaways is often tagged as an alien, otherworldly place – the kind of forbidding surface where Mars explorers get tested and sci-fi flicks are shot. Yet on foot it's natural to

sense other realities, including the life of these hills for the Antakirinja people. These slopes resound as home to journey, ceremony, ancestors and an eternity of ochre-rich stories.

Though hardly earth shattering, my little stroll did have a familiar tempo and drift. All of us make our own walking rituals. The way we connect breath and gait. How we angle across a slope or thread among vegetation. The means by which a single footfall can trigger unconscious thought. There's also some basic biology here. Our bodies are engineered for striding; we're wired for covering ground.

These days so much time is spent arbitrating between different versions of reality. The world comes at us in a media blitz. All those filtered views, holograms and facsimiles create an illusion of control. We get to shape our worlds, mastering insights out of the ether. The seductive detail at the touch of mouse button is staggering. It just keeps on coming – and nothing is sacred.

'Earlier this week, two teams from Google strapped on sophisticated backpacks jammed with cameras, gyroscopes and other gadgets, and descended to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. But this is just the first step in the search giant's plan to digitally map and photograph the world's wild places.'

(America's NPR website)

By contrast, taking an actual hike feels like a holiday. You get to submit to the simplicity of what's evident before your very eyes. That

kind of humility has the air of freedom and affirmation joined as one. As René Descartes might have said: 'I walk, therefore I am.' Or, 'I walk, therefore it must be!'

If it's such a path to truth, how come tramping around is given such short shrift? Australians might be inveterate travellers and overlanders but walking doesn't figure much in our recent popular cultures. Perhaps it's the sheer scale of the place, the hard, energy-defeating distances. Or perhaps we're too citified and suckered into a consumer culture. Then again, maybe it's just a matter of time. Maybe we just need a few more generations to walk ourselves into a shared history of making tracks.

Other parts of the world enjoy much stronger traditions with trail life, and nowhere more so than the UK. There the business of wandering countryside is embedded in poetry, art and song. One of the most avid recent chroniclers of this legacy is Robert Macfarlane. His latest book, *The Old Ways*, takes a series of different journeys on foot – mostly in the British Isles – as the starting point for reflections on the part played by wayfarers of many kinds.

As the title hints there's an elegiac note to these essays. Macfarlane is a Cambridge don so at times the writing does get a bit windy: 'In the dusk of the Holloways, these pasts felt excitingly alive and coexistent – as if time had somehow pleated back on itself, bringing discontinuous moments into contact, and creating historical

correspondences that survived as a territorial imperative to concealment and escape.'

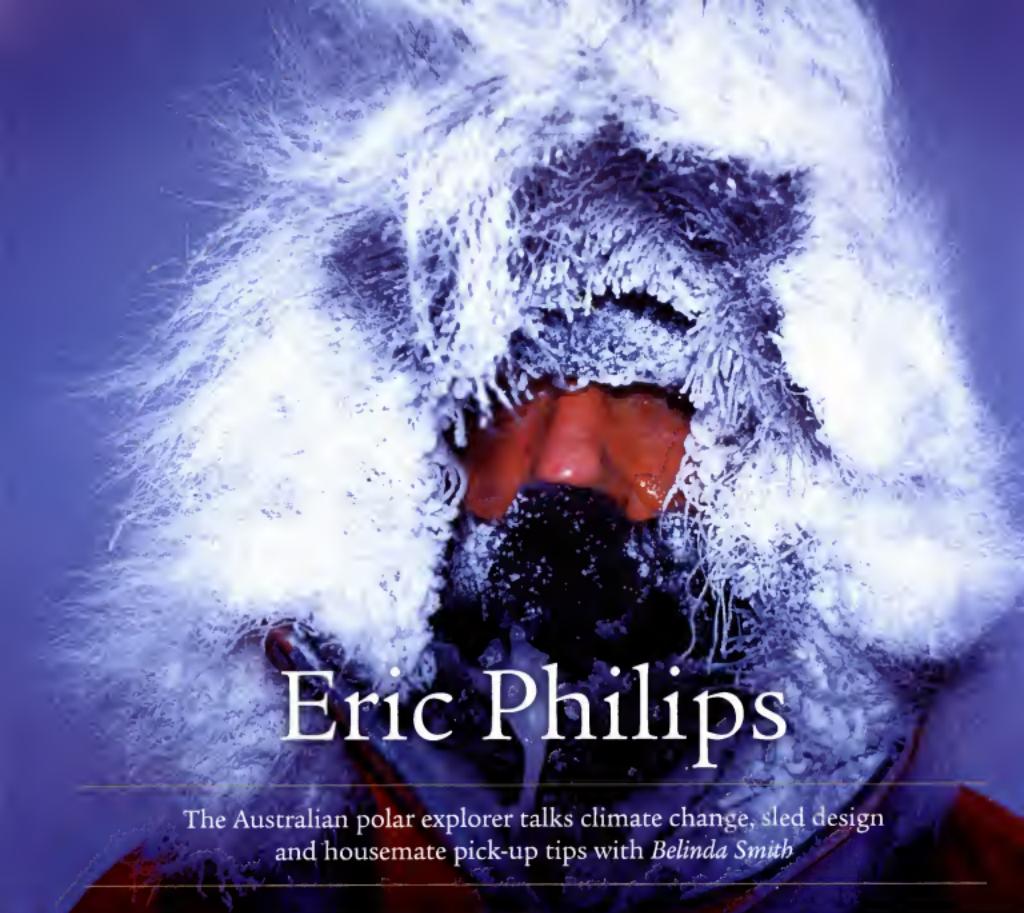
Mostly, however, Macfarlane is nimble with his descriptions of being on foot. There's also a rich supporting cast of travelling companions, historical figures and fellow Raiders of the Lost Paths. Among the voices quoted is that of the American John Brinckerhoff: 'For untold thousands of years we travelled on foot over rough paths, not simply as peddlers or commuters or tourists, but as men and women for whom the path and road stood for some intense experience: freedom, new human relationships, a new awareness of the landscape. The road offered a journey into the unknown that could end up allowing us to discover who we were.'

All of this is a long way from the gritty ground of *The Breakaways*. No one who treasures walking necessarily needs to be told about the felt experience of making tracks. We've learnt to take the world in our stride. But every now and then it's good to be reminded of what it can signify when we tread to the brink of our understanding – and in whose footsteps we are following. Walking might be elementary, yet it carries great hidden power. As Mr Macfarlane notes: 'The body knows things in ways that the conscious mind cannot.' **W**

A *Wild* contributor since issue no 3, Quentin Chester is a freelance journalist and the author of six books about wilderness places. Website: [www.quentinchester.com](http://www.quentinchester.com) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/QuentinChester](http://www.facebook.com/QuentinChester)

*The Breakaways. Photo: Quentin Chester*





# Eric Philips

The Australian polar explorer talks climate change, sled design and housemate pick-up tips with *Belinda Smith*

**L**unchtime, and Tullamarine Airport is at its busy worst. As I duck through gaggles of disorganised families and striding suits, I can just make out Eric Philips' voice coming from the phone pressed to my ear: 'Nah, other end of the terminal. Look for the kayak.'

Peering through the throng I see him sitting at a café – and there's the kayak too, fire engine red, nonchalantly leaning against the counter.

I'm catching Eric for a coffee while he waits to check in to a flight back to Tasmania. He has a broad smile, sandy eyebrows and a smattering of ginger brown hair across his pate. He speaks eloquently, with the easy cadence of someone familiar with the public speaking circuit, and often ends sentences with a hearty chuckle that can spill over into the next. Today, he's dressed in a merino long sleeved T-shirt, jeans, and casual shoes. It's in vast contrast to many photos on his website, where his face is hidden by clumps of snow

and the rest of him swaddled in layers of insulation, blustery gusts of wind blowing sheets of icy particles across the frozen landscape around him as he drags a sled across a polar icecap.

The day before this interview, he visited the former kayak manufacturer Dagger near Wangaratta to discuss construction of a new, blunt stern kayak, designed to double as a sled for polar expeditions in March. (Pointing to the rear of the full-size kayak in front of us, he says: 'Like this, it's inefficient in terms of space. With a wider end, you could pack a lot more in.')

Innovation isn't something Eric takes lightly. With more than 20 years of mountaineering and polar exploration experience, Eric recognises the value in minimising risk, and improving design is one of his passions. As well as having skied to both poles and across the world's four largest icecaps, he is the inventor of products specifically for extreme cold conditions, including ski

bindings and sled-hauling harnesses.

'I find projects like this fascinating,' he says, gesturing to the kayak again. 'One thing that I find a bit irksome is the necessity of adventurers to just replicate stuff that's gone on in the past. I've found that always quite tedious, using the same technology that's failed regularly or treading the same routes that have been done ad nauseum.'

It's safe to say that Eric's desire to explore new territory extends to all aspects of life – he can add star of an Emmy Award-winning documentary, author, Order of Australia Medal recipient, judo black belt, musician, husband, and father of two to the many strings on his bow.

Eric was born in 1962 in Melbourne and grew up in Adelaide, the son of Dutch immigrants. 'In some ways, I grew up heavily influenced by my parents' love of life,' he says. 'They were very outdoorsy and loved camping, getting out into the bush and

**'When I skied with Jon Muir to the North Pole in 2002, it was nice for the phones to break after ten days or so – to be completely free of any communication.'**

sourcing gear and everything. It was very much a Geelong Grammar School project.

'Of course after I'd done my first polar expedition, that was it. Teaching was,' he says, punctuating the sentence with a cut-throat gesture, 'done for'.

Eric met his wife Susy after he relocated to Melbourne. 'I moved into a flat in Elwood and put an ad in the paper looking for a flatmate,' he says. 'She was a person who responded and hey presto – we hooked up six months after she moved in. A bottle of whisky and a game of Scrabble; I think that's what pushed us over the edge.' He laughs at the memory, his smile lingering. But that was the early 1990s. Australia was reeling from its deepest post-war recession and, at a time when national unemployment was pushing 11 per cent, life was a bit of a struggle.

'I became a pauper, basically,' he says. 'I worked in an outdoor store for a while, but was really on the poverty line. At the same time I started a family so it was pretty tough times back then but I was pig-headed. That was the way I wanted to earn a living. Then the trip across Greenland in 1995 got a fair bit of traction through the film that we made, and that kind of launched everything else.'

The film, *Chasing the Midnight Sun*, screened in dozens of countries and won the Emmy Award for Best Cinematography in 1997. It documented Eric, fellow adventurer Ben Galbraith, and cameraman Wade Fairley as they kayaked (with Larry Gray), skied, and kited across Greenland. Even though it was filmed 17 years ago, he is instantly

recognisable in the movie today – albeit with tufts of hair spilling over the nape of his neck, cheeks peppered with stubble, fewer lines around his eyes, and dressed in a technicolour paddling cag. 'You can't escape from the cold,' he said in the opening scenes, gently paddling around icebergs.

Since then, Eric made polar expeditions his forte, filmed a couple more documentaries, and started professional guiding in 2004. He was Pat Farmer's polar guide from the North Pole to Canada, and again from Union Glacier to the South Pole, during Pat's epic Pole-to-Pole run in 2011. Eric's been to the South Pole five times, and the North Pole around 17 times – although he's lost count now, he says. 'I find more and more that now, rather than individual clients and building up a team slowly to have enough people to go and do a trip, I'm getting enquiries from organisations and companies and schools that have an idea to do a trip with a set number of people,' he replies when asked how the trips have changed since he founded Icetrek Expeditions. 'They come to me and I can put the logistics together and have the gear and off we go as an autonomous team rather than a collective of individuals.'

'I'm taking 13 Greenpeace people to the North Pole [in March 2013]. That's for a massive global campaign to bring awareness to the plight and destruction of the Arctic. Twenty-five years ago, they did this campaign in Antarctica and now it's protected as a World Park.'

At this point in the interview, a small boy

*Eric while skiing from Russia to the North Pole, with Jon Muir, in 2002. They travelled more than 900 kilometres in 58 days. All photos supplied by Eric Philips*

driving to Flinders Ranges and the Grampians. Because of that grounding it felt natural for me to, under my own steam, want to go into those environments.'

He started a degree in teaching at the Salisbury College of Advanced Education in 1980 and graduated six years later with a Diploma of Teaching, a Bachelor of Education, and a Graduate Diploma in Outdoor Education.

'I became one of the first qualified outdoor education teachers in Australia. It was quite rare in the early 1980s,' he says. 'That launched me into getting a job at Timbertop [Geelong Grammar School's campus in the Victorian Alps] and really was the making of me becoming a professional outdoor educator.'

'In my final year I put together a committee of students who helped me plan my first expedition, which was to Ellesmere Island in northern Canada. They helped look for sponsors, helped with nutrition and diet,

*Eric with wife Susy and children Kip (left) and Mardi at Commonwealth Bay, Antarctica, in 2006.*



across the hall who'd been eyeing off the kayak breaks free from his mother's hand hold and runs over, curious about the big red piece of plastic plonked in the middle of the airport. Eric barely notices the attention, just as he ignores the glares of airport security staff as they wander past, keeping a watchful eye on us. It's hard to tell if Eric is so used to attracting attention he doesn't notice it anymore, or if the serious turn of conversation has taken him away from our bustling surrounds.

'I was with Greenpeace in 2009 on a circumnavigation of Greenland looking at the rate of ice cap melting and the speed of glaciers and it's actually horrific,' he says emphatically. 'Some glaciers sped up threefold in the space of five years and that means that the calving face is breaking away much faster than it ever was, putting more icebergs into the Arctic Ocean and contributing to the melt and sea rise.'

His passion for the untouched environment, and keeping it such, is obvious in Chasing the Midnight Sun. Upon encountering the abandoned radar base Dye-2, Eric, for the first time, looks uneasy. 'It's like sleeping in a trash can,' he intones to the camera, and pitched his tent within its metal walls. It's not until the following morning when it was time to go that Eric once again looked

chirpy. 'The sooner the Greenland ice cap swallows Dye-2 up, the better,' he said cheerfully, striding away from the harsh, metal domes.

At another point in the documentary, crouched in a tent and describing the danger associated with continued rain, Eric said with a chuckle, 'I think I'd rather be at home in bed with my wife.' The very next scene, however, Eric emerged from the tent into a crisp, chilly morning, and with unmistakable

excitement, exclaimed, 'It's going to be superb!' His sheer joy at the weather, the (sometimes fuel-contaminated) food, his MacGyver-esque sled repair skills – just being out in the elements – suggest thoughts of home are as far away as home itself.

'Susy's been incredibly supportive,' he tells me, as another pod of airport security staff slowly wanders past. 'It's almost impossible for a person who spends as much time away from home as I do to continue this kind of

*Eric traversing Greenland with Ben Galbraith in 1995. They often travelled at night to avoid the softer snow conditions when the sun was up.*



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lifestyle without a partner who's totally selfless. A lot of the time you might be home but your mind's elsewhere. A lot of my friends who do this kind of stuff are divorced or separated but we're still together, and it's primarily because of her tolerance of me being so self-centred.'

Often away for months on end, Eric is well aware that his chosen career can place heavy strain on relationships – especially when things go wrong. Yet he doesn't seem to mind all that much.

'When I skied with Jon Muir to the North Pole in 2002, it was nice for the phones to break after ten days or so – to be completely free of any communication,' he divulges. 'All we had was a satellite beacon sending our position every day to the website, so the press and family could see where we were. But it then went off radar for seven days or so – and all hell broke loose. There were reports we'd been eaten by polar bears, we'd drowned, we were never coming back, and it really weighed heavily on our wives who were affected by what the media were reporting. Deep inside, though, they thought it must've been a technical glitch and that's exactly what it was.'

'We had no idea it was broken. The unit doesn't tell you if it's transmitting or not. I picked it up one day and noticed the aerial

was loose and thought, "Oh, that's a bit odd." I clicked it into place and of course unbeknownst to us it started to transmit our location again.'

Despite a number of close calls, he doesn't keep work and family separate. The Tasmanian wilderness is a fitting place for Eric and his family to live, and they've been there nearly ten years. His 17-year-old daughter Mardi and ten-year-old son Kip join him outdoors – Mardi especially. 'She walked the Overland Track by herself [in 2011] when she was 15,' Eric says proudly. 'That seems to be a natural progression for her. She loves that kind of thing. She's interested in working at Timbertop as a gap student in 2014, if they'll have her, and the same year I'm hoping she'll come with me on her first North Pole trip.'

'My son's an entertainer. He'll be the kind of guy who'll be on stage or television. I still get him out into the outdoors when I can – give him a good balance.'

The Philips family visited east Antarctica in 2006 – with Kip celebrating his fifth birthday at Mawson's hut – and in 2009, Eric took students from Geelong Grammar sailing across the Drake Passage to Antarctica.

'That was a full-on sailing, climbing, sea kayaking, and skiing expedition,' he says matter-of-factly. 'I'm taking a primary school group from England on a North Pole

expedition in 2014; just a short trip, 15 kilometres or so over the course of four or five days. It's pretty out there.'

Primary school kids – that's pretty young, isn't it?'

'More and more I'm discovering that we need to give kids a bit more credit for the ability to pull off really extraordinary things,' he replies. 'They need to be in an environment where they're allowed to explore and break free but still in a monitored environment with the correct professional supervision. If they've got that, they're capable of almost anything.'

'Let's give them more credit, more freedom. Take the bubble wrap, padding and technology away from around them and let them experience the way we lived 20 years ago. The wilderness is the last vestige we can let them roam free in a little bit.'

And with that, it's time for Eric to check in. He drags the last of his latte, single-handedly grasps the kayak's cockpit rim, and with an easy, fluid movement, effortlessly balances the craft up on his left shoulder. We shake hands and say goodbye, and he weaves his way through the crowd towards the service counters, the red slash of a kayak bobbing along at head height, as easily as if he was in the chilled calm of an Arctic fjord. **W**

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*The view northeast along the Snowy River. All photos by Michele Kohout*

# Starting the New Year *on top of Australia*

*Michele Kohout dodges cover charges and taxi queues and walks solo up Mt Kosciuszko instead*





I looked up at the imposing and distant Ramshead Range as I made final adjustments to my pack at Dead Horse Gap – I was keen to get up there. It had been a few years since I had last walked around the Kosciuszko plateau and wondered if this year was going to be the one where I took the easy option of taking the chairlift up... But I couldn't do that. To do that would be to miss out on the ascent through snowgums and emerge at the treeline to be rewarded by masses of alpine flowers. To do that would be cheating.

The going was slow, partly due to it being a while since I had hefted a pack and partly because going solo means there is no one else to help carry the gear. A two-kilogram camera and a tripod don't help! The track from Dead Horse Gap to the main track to Mt Kosciuszko seemed longer (5.3km) and steeper (rise in altitude of 486m) than I remembered. Having started the walk at 4.30pm, it was lovely to be on the Main Range track around 6pm when the last day walkers were leaving. I had the place to myself and I felt on top of the world despite my weariness. I was now among rocky outcrops and low heaths and herbfields, small trickling streams and sweeping panoramas.

The afternoon light was beautiful. Camp the first night was below Lake Cootapatamba, below the summit of Mt Kosciuszko. This is one of the four lakes of the Kosciuszko plateau that were formed by glacial action. Nowhere else on mainland Australia do glacial lakes occur. These lakes contain the freshest water on the mainland due to the very low salt and nutrient content. The number of visitors to the area means that camping is not allowed in the headwaters of these lakes and this is now highlighted with numerous signs along the main walking track. Though this is hardly limiting as the area has numerous possibilities for 'dispersed area camping' as the brochure from the NPWS service explained.

I dawdled over my dinner, looking around at the snowpatch above Lake Cootapatamba, the flowers surrounding the tent, last light fading into the valleys near Khancoban. Eventually the cold, not lack of light, forced me into the tent at 9pm with numb fingers. It was bliss to have soft snow grass under my tent – my absolute favourite – and I could barely wait for the next day. I was itching to explore and absorb the unique alpine environment.

I was up at 5.15am – the tent was frozen solid on the outside. The morning light was

spectacular, with clouds in the valleys beyond Charlottes Pass. My gourmet breakfast of porridge with dried strawberries and apricots polished off, I shook the ice off the tent, packed up and headed up to Rawson's Pass. Here I nearly fell over with the surprise of seeing the new toilets. New Years Eve 1998 was spent near here with friends and we will never forget a septic truck coming to pump out the portaloos at this same spot at 3am on New Year's Day – we were incredulous. The new toilets are partly built into the hillside, made of sturdy stainless steel and of the composting variety. They were, no doubt, another way of protecting the alpine environment from the pressures of visitor use, for which I was more than happy to fork out my Parks Pass.

The snow daisies were looking particularly spectacular towards Mueller's Pass. Alpine plants only have a short period in which to flower and seed, and it is this small window of opportunity that creates spectacular displays in alpine areas as plants vie for pollinators and seed dispersers.

The slopes above Lake Albina are one of the best for quiet contemplation that I know. The view is just so classically beautiful; green slopes leading the eye to a blue lake, valleys and ridges beyond completing the picture. I



Clockwise from top left: Creek near Hedley Tarn; the author at Ramshead North; Snow Daisies (*Celmisia* species); Candle Heath (*Richea continentis*).

could have stayed there all day, but I didn't. Carruthers Peak came and went and I found myself at Blue Lake, the largest glacial lake of the Kosciuszko area. From there, I wandered to Hedley Tarn, surrounded by the magical smell of heaths (*Eucryphia* species). A cormorant and heron at the tarn were the only birds apart from the numerous ravens, pipits and the lone nankeen kestrel I had seen that day. Being such a harsh environment, birds are only visitors rather than permanent residents.

From Hedley Tarn, I made my way southwest, crossing a boulder-strewn creek with little cascades. Climbing a small ridge, I abruptly regained the track, continued south and found a perfect campsite near the top of the ridge and shielded from the track by some rocks. It was comforting to know that the track was a few hundred metres away in case I woke to find the area covered in a blanket of thick fog in the morning. My view for the evening was of Mt Kosciuszko just visible behind Mt Clarke. After the influx of day walkers subsided, the remaining people in the landscape were camped far off in the distance, near Blue Lake, visible only by their conspicuous orange tent. I looked smugly at my grey/green one and was happy to know I was somewhat camouflaged among the alpine vegetation.

The calls of swallows wheeling high overhead woke me early and I emerged from the tent to photograph fields of snow daisies in the weak morning sunlight. Walkers were out early and by the time I had packed up and reached the crossing of the Snowy River, there was a solid procession of day and overnight walkers. A group of three generations amused me. An older man and young boy carried daypacks, while two middle-aged men carried a veritable assortment of cooking implements and sleeping paraphernalia strapped to the

to see sunset on New Year's Eve (that night) and sunrise the next day I thought that near where I'd camped on my first night, below Lake Cootapatamba, was the best. How wonderful to see three generations doing this on New Year's Eve. I hoped they'd have a great time.

Pausing briefly at crowded Charlottes Pass only to use the toilets, I made my way towards Mt Stillwell. The slopes were covered in carpets of mauve Mountain Eyebrights. From the summit I continued along Kangaroo Ridge and felt a bit of relief and

## The views for New Year's Eve were looking good – Mt Kosciuszko, Ramshead Range, Kangaroo Ridge, Snowy Plain. The rocks around me and the summit of Mt Kosciuszko were illuminated orange as the sun set.

outside of small, old packs. One of these blokes stopped and said to me, 'Can I ask you a question? Can I ask how much your pack weighs?' I told him it weighed about 18 kilograms and he said his must be about 40 kilograms. Little wonder with tinned fruit, sausages and a frypan! They asked for advice as to the best place to camp in order

satisfaction to be walking off-track and away from the masses. The views of the Main Range were awesome and the boulder-filled landscape immediately surrounding me was stunning. During the walk, temperatures on the lowlands got to more than 35°C, which meant that as the air heated and rose on the surrounding plains, clouds formed from

lunchtime onwards. I was in raptures over the Ansell Adams-like scenery: White puffy clouds against blue skies, fantastic boulders and rocks, interesting valleys to the south.

Unfortunately, there was no water on Kangaroo Ridge and I descended to the floodplain of Merrits Creek and the Snowy River. Walking was not easy due to small intermittent pools (now dry) creating a lumpy surface. I followed the Snowy River upstream, taking shortcuts between the river's meanderings and eventually climbing a slope to find another perfect campsite, this time about 500 metres from the boardwalk near the Cootapatamba Lookout. The views for New Year's Eve were looking good – Mt Kosciuszko, Ramshead Range, Kangaroo Ridge, Snowy Plain. The rocks around me and the summit of Mt Kosciuszko were illuminated orange as the sun set.

Dinner was quite a feast and I had a bit of a revelation about camping food. I love food. I love cooking complex recipes – but not when I am on an overnight bushwalk. Somehow I have never been bothered to take my gourmet tendencies out for a walk. Food ceases to be important in incredible surroundings and I tend to eat just to sustain my energy. But that was about to change. I have had a food dehydrator for years and used it mainly to dry excess produce from my garden. A colleague had talked to me about dehydrated bushwalking meals and with much scepticism I had done some (untested) experimenting before this trip. Tonight was pasta with a dehydrated beef, sage and wine sauce. I looked dubiously at the hard bullets of minced beef as I poured boiling water over the concoction. Minutes later I was tucking into fabulous pasta and beside myself with a new future in camping

food! Who'd have thought rock hard, dry food could rehydrate into something pretty close to what it originally was?

Next morning, the first rays of sunlight for the New Year came up over the horizon and I had breakfast looking at the Ramshead Range and contemplating an exploration within. The Ramshead Range seems to be little visited, which amazes me. It has spectacular rock formations and is close to the track leading to Mt Kosciuszko, but I suppose the goal for most people is to get to Mt Kosciuszko. Keen to get closer to the prominent pyramid-like peak of Ramshead North, I packed up, and got going. I could only see two people in the vast landscape – a couple at Kosciuszko Lookout. I descended to the track and left it again before they had a chance to leave the lookout.

The origin of the Snowy River surely starts below Ramshead North, with small trickles and pools converging. I began making mental notes about future camping here – excellent grassy areas with grass of the non-hummocky variety, water close by and incredible rock formations and views. With so much potential, it would likely be a serious dilemma deciding exactly where to

pitch a tent! The only other problem with the Ramshead Range is that it consists of such a profusion of rocks that it is hard to know precisely where one is on a map. I could see how this might be problematic in bad weather.

I explored rocks and drifts of snow daisies. I walked to the edge of the range and looked down at the track. It was so far away – I hadn't realised how steadily I had climbed since leaving it. To access the area, one would either need to climb up the Ramshead Range from Dead Horse Gap or from where I had made my way up a small slope between Kosciuszko and Cootapatamba Lookouts.

Eventually I began the descent to Dead Horse Gap, passing some favourite snow gums and unknowingly taking exactly the same shot as I had six years previously I descended to a hot afternoon and a car park teeming with people. As I drove back towards Melbourne I thought about my favourite walk, the awesome rock formations, the flowers, the views and about how good the start to the New Year had been. Very different to the one spent with friends in the same area a few years ago, but just as inspiring and memorable. W

The 2011/12 flowering season was initially predicted to be one of the best recorded for some time, with significantly higher flowering from some species, such as Snow Daisies (*Celmisia* species). However, some species showed lower than average flowering (eg Billy Buttons, *Cuspidia* species), while other species were not in flower at the time of survey compared to previous years (eg Alpine Hovea). This highlights the periodicity (the tendency to flower heavily in some years and lightly or not at all in others) that is common for alpine plants. In addition, the unpredictability of the alpine climate can have large repercussions for reproduction. A large snowfall in mid-January 2012 at Kosciuszko impacted plants that had not yet completed their reproductive cycle and significantly reduced the amount of seed set.

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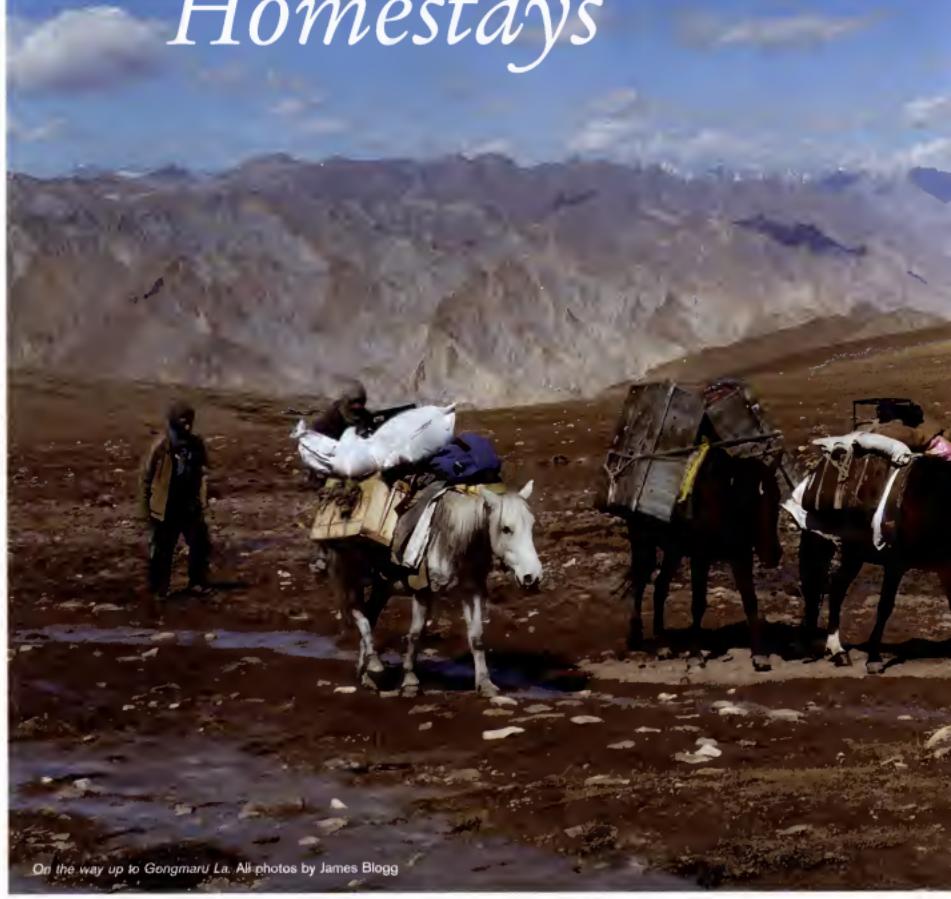
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# *Ladakhi Life* and *High Altitude* *Homestays*



*On the way up to Gongmaru La. All photos by James Blagg*

*Suzanne and James Blogg spent eight days in the Jammu and Kashmir region of India, nestled in the Great Himalayan Range*

We arrive at Thochunse camp (4150m) to find that the parachute tent we are hoping to stay in is closed for the season and we are going to have to sleep rough. Fortunately, a shepherd still has a tea tent open. It has long benches made of rocks covered with old horse blankets, which we think we can sleep on. A tattered ex-Indian army parachute flapping above,

originally used for cargo drops, provides the only protection. The parachute is held down in places with rocks in an attempt to windproof the shelter. The shepherd is dressed in traditional red robes and sits inside a small store attached to the tea tent. He offers to sell us battered ancient tins of fruit then charges us a small sum for the privilege of sleeping on his stone seats before he locks up his snug little

room and climbs up the side of the steep valley. In the dwindling light we take stock of our situation.

As the wind starts to rise we try to build up the walls of the shelter with rocks to provide a better windbreak. The temperature drops and wolves howl in the distance. I ask James if we have made a terrible mistake. Should we walk back down to Hankar?





**Clockwise from left:** Rumbak village; horses plod along in Skiu; a girl in Markha.  
**Opposite page:** Suzanne at the top of Ganda La (4850m).



Ladakh is a desert with a Tibetan Buddhist history. As a consequence the trekking provides unique opportunities to experience a continuing traditional lifestyle in a dramatic landscape with ancient monasteries (gompas), chortens (stupas) and mani walls. Archaeological exploration has only recently started in Markha Valley, although protohistorical rock art has been discovered and the late medieval architecture along the valley is still in place.

We arrive in Leh, the capital of this kingdom, by plane in mid-September. We decide to take the spectacular flight to Leh, which is high at 3500 metres, rather than to attempt the bus trip, which reaches heights of over 5000 metres. The bus has been known to break down, leaving passengers stranded with altitude sickness.

In Leh we visit the Office of Snow Leopard Adventure where they tell us about the homestay system which operates on the Markha Valley trek. They warn us that we may have a problem if the parachute tent is closed at Thochuntse camp, which is before the highest of the two passes we will cross. We also meet a French couple, Kev and Camille, and decide to share a jeep with them from Leh to the trailhead at Zinchen the next morning. Everyone reassures us that it won't rain.

Within an hour of starting the trail to Rumbak village (3960m) with Ken and Camille we have to seek shelter to avoid the rain in a tent with two workmen. They provide us with tea and biscuits then refuse



offers of payment. The rain stops, and after several river crossings, we come across a group of animal watchers, ecstatic after spotting a snow leopard high on the ridge above. We head up to Rumbak village where each trekking party is shared among the households so everyone gets a piece of the business. Kev, who has never walked at high altitude before, wants to continue to Yurise but we convince him to stay the night so that they will be better acclimatised before attempting the pass. We try to follow several rules for trekking at high altitude: start early, go slow, sleep not more than an additional 300 metres higher each night, and take acetazolamide (Diamox) after ascending above 3000 metres but descend if symptoms persist.

Our homestay is run by an ex-military man, who is still fit, and his wife. There is a monk sitting on a mat chanting, flicking through cards inscribed with ancient scripture. He never stops chanting apart from when he eats or drinks. He is in the seat of honour, farthest from the door and next to the stove. Windows brightly light the room with views across the field. It is all dark wood, red carpets and shiny traditional brass pots and urns with a traditional wood-fire stove. I help pod peels before dinner. We have a lovely room on the rooftop but during the night I have to move my mattress around as rainwater leaks through the roof. In the morning we receive a nice packed lunch before leaving.

The next day, we walk along a valley with walls banded in purple, magenta and rich browns. Some time after arriving at Yurise homestay (4120m), we see another group arrive and watch while they argue with their guide. They turn out to be Poles and had only left Leh that day but one of the men wants to keep going to prove that he can get over the 4850-metre Ganda La in one day. The woman in their group is sick with a bad cold and it is already late. We suggest that they stay the night, as they have no chance of making it over the pass that day. The group of animal watchers arrives and everyone stays the night with the Poles camping in the dining room. We sit around the stove and watch our hosts cook chapatis and all enjoy the traditional vegetarian meal together.



During the night we move our mattresses around to avoid water leaks and dogs bark beneath our window.

We leave early and are quickly overtaken by the lightly equipped animal watchers. When we catch up to them they insist on sharing their telescopes to watch bharal (Himalayan blue sheep) camouflaged against the purple walls of the valley.

We say goodbye to Kev and Camille at Skiu the next day. They catch a bus from Chiling and we continue our trek up the Markha Valley. We pass pretty houses with gardens full of bright flowers. James had diarrhoea overnight. He develops stomach cramps and makes several emergency stops as we make our way up the valley. I feel a sore throat coming on.

## **While we wait for our food, a young boy tells us we cannot go on to Thochunse camp as there is no one there and the parachute tent is closed. But feeling revived by the hot noodles we decide to go on, hoping he is wrong.**

Great views of the Stok range are provided from Ganda La but the wind is bitterly cold so we quickly descend down the brown and muddy valley to Shingo, an oasis beside a fast-flowing stream. We stay at a large home cut out of the cliff behind. We get rooms on the roof top again with Kev and Camille. This homestay has two tough but delightful young children who find us in our room and jump on us while we rest in bed. The Poles arrive later with a second of their party now suffering from a cold, and two more members have altitude sickness with severe headaches and nausea due to their rapid ascent. James is a doctor and convinces them to take some Diamox and to descend to Skiu to alleviate their symptoms.

The afternoon is hot and the landscape becomes dry and harsh. We are able to replenish our water supply at a spring and discuss turning back as we now feel quite unwell. Eventually we arrive at Sara where there is a large French group and a German lone traveller, both camping with large support teams of guides and horses. We decide to stay an extra night here to rest.

The walk to Markha follows a spectacular track with regular wide river crossings. After the first river crossing, James stops on an exposed rocky section with another bout of diarrhoea. I yell out that I hear people coming but he is beyond caring. A man arrives with two donkeys and finds the sight of a tall white man with his pants half down quite amusing.

We walk into Markha village past the crumbling stronghold and palace, Markha Khar, with Kangyaze mountain (6400m) in the distance. We watch as the locals, including a young monk, harvest the ripe wheat. A group of antelope sneak into the fields and the monk throws stones at them to chase them away. The antelopes retreat up the vertical valley walls where they merge with the rocks and it is difficult for us to keep track of them. They edge back to feed on the ripe wheat when the harvesters aren't looking. We stay at a small homestay high up next to the monastery. The toilet, unfortunately for James, is located five minutes away past the monastery, hanging on the edge of a cliff with great views of the old fort and palace and up and down the valley.

We enjoy a large lunch cooked by a teenage girl home from her school in Leh. The monk and her family join us before returning to the harvest. They laugh when we tell them about the monk at our first homestay who chanted even when going to the toilet and James' encounter that day with the man and two donkeys. Later we wash in the river far below. There is no running water in or near their home. At dinner the mother insists on adding yak butter to our tea, a special treat.

The underlying principle of their Buddhist philosophy is compassion and a life of love and goodwill. Sharing the meals and good humour of this family and monk gives us an opportunity to gain insight into



Approaching Nimaling.  
Below: Yurutse.

their lives. That night they play us loud western pop music on an old cassette player. Otherwise, this isolated traditional community appears to live a life largely unchanged. In winter, when the pass is closed, residents must walk out to Chiling for supplies with donkeys – leaving home

interrupted by the arrival of donkeys heavily loaded with harvested wheat. While we wait for our food, a young boy tells us we cannot go on to Thochunse camp as there is no one there and the parachute tent is closed. But feeling revived by the hot noodles we decide to go on, hoping he is

## Walking at this high altitude is very slow, just one foot in front of the other. We start to get headaches during the last hour of the ascent and have a small dose of Diamox to prevent symptoms worsening.

at 5am to reach their destination at 11.30pm. River crossings must be difficult when the river is high, as the thin track that detours along the mountain wall has recently been destroyed by landslides.

We now both have a sore throat and a cold. However, we still feel so inspired that we persist with our walk to Hankar where we will decide if we are strong enough to make it over the pass, or if we will retreat back to Chiling.

Outside of Markha we refill our water bottles from a spring and then make two river crossings – changing into sandals saves us from having to 're-boot' between the ice-cold crossings. The river crossings are fine as the river is quite low. After the last crossing we walk up a steep track to Umlung Gompa a narrow path.

We stop for an early lunch at a homestay on the edge of Hankar (3980m), which is

wrong. We need to make it to Thochunse to be able to cross Kongmaru La the next day. To attempt the pass in one day would be too extreme at 5100 metres and to go on to the higher camp at Nimaling at 4730 metres, where the parachute tent is most likely still open, would involve too great an ascent for one day.

We pass by Hankar's impressive old fort, chortens and mani walls. It takes two hours of walking along a river and a rocky pass through a mountain to reach Thochunse camp (4150m). Settling down to our dinner, which was the lunch the Markha homestay had provided for us, we are disappointed to find that it consists of jam on chapatis, boiled eggs and inedible undercooked boiled potatoes. People arrive with horses, returning from the Nimaling plains to Hankar. Their young children help round up the horses and keep them



moving. The children are tough, self-sufficient and confident.

As night falls we lay out the bed mats we carried for this eventuality on the narrow rock seats and get in our sleeping bags with all our clothes on. I watch the large yaks lumber down the mountain and lie around the tea tent, silhouetted in the moonlight. Eventually the wind drops but then comes up from the opposite direction where we have no windbreak. The air is so cold that it hurts to breathe. The wolves howl all night.

James laughs when he turns on his headlamp in the morning. My mat has moved off the narrow rock bench on to the ground apart from only the corner, which still sits under my head. I was wondering why I felt so uncomfortable. It is still dark when we leave at 4.30am. We use our headlamps to try and make our way up to the plains of Nimaling. In the first few minutes we lose the track but James wanders around until he finds it, a faint trail along the rocky valley floor. We watch the sun come up as we make it to the lake the shepherd had told us to look out for,

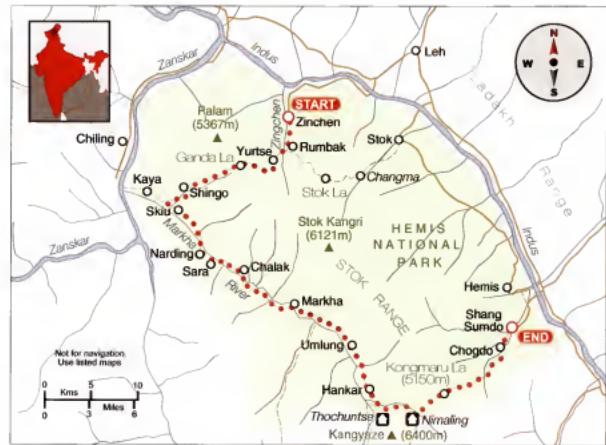
which is really just a pond. It is so cold and I wear every warm thing I have.

As we reach Nimaling, the French group we met at Sara come out of their tents to silently watch as we arrive seemingly out of nowhere. We have two bowls of hot noodle soup and leave the parachute tent owner our bed mats for his next guests. He is thrilled and we now have the energy to complete the final part of the climb.

Walking at this high altitude is very slow, just one foot in front of the other. We start to get headaches during the last hour of the ascent and have a small dose of Diamox to prevent symptoms worsening. We catch up to the French group at the top of the 5100-metre Kongmaru La. They celebrate European style, passing their hip flasks around and taking lots of photos with their guides and porters.

We promptly continue as we know that there is a long hard descent to come. Some of the French group's guides are already ahead of us with their donkeys and horses. It is very steep and many sections of the track have been destroyed by floods and landslides. We both slip and fall during the walk down but each time manage to catch ourselves with our walking sticks. We make it to a tea tent just before Chogdo several hours later.

We make countless river crossings after



lunch because much of the track had been washed away in the previous year's floods, eventually reaching Shang Sumdo (3600m). At the homestay there is no bathroom but they bring us a bucket of hot water. We walked for more than nine hours that day.

The next morning we catch an early bus and pass through a series of towns, each built around impressive monasteries, to the wonderful city of Leh, which reminds me

of Kathmandu, and their delicious apple pies, when I first visited 30 years ago.

*Suzanne Bogg* is an epidemiologist and *James Bogg* a public health physician. They currently live in Jakarta and work on HIV prevention. Their work has previously taken them to Malawi, Fiji, Timor Leste, Aceh, Yemen and the Congo as well as many parts of Australia. They each started travelling more than 30 years ago, before meeting each other, backpacking around Asia. Their favourite holiday destinations are trekking in Nepal and northern India.



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Discover photography in Tasmania's wilderness...

*This rare congregation of budgies is the result of two good years of rain producing an abundance of seed, followed by a very dry year drawing the smaller flocks into one water source to form the biggest murmuration seen in 12 years.*



# Majestic Murmurations

The humble budgie swarms en masse at a waterhole near Alice Springs. *Steven Pearce* captured the flock in flight





Clockwise from top left: Normally hidden in grass, this many budgies in flight is a rare sight; A falcon moves in but the dazzling display leaves it confused and hungry; Long-dead hollow acacia trees provide nesting and resting sites; Budgies glide into the water for a drink.

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Steven Pearce is a travelling photographer based in Alice Springs. Over the past three years he's worked as a photographic tutor on several Aboriginal communities throughout Central Australia and the Kimberley but his mainstay is corporate and commercial assignments in Alice Springs. [www.stevenpearcephoto.com](http://www.stevenpearcephoto.com)







# Land of Everlasting Sand

*Dave Cauldwell walks along the longest stretch of protected coastline in New South Wales, in search of the endangered coastal emu*

The spur-winged plover rises into the air on a coastal thermal, hovering briefly before dive-bombing and missing my head by what feels like inches. I cower and stumble towards the cliff edge. Seconds later, it swoops once more. Its mate is on the ground just in front of me, chest puffed out and the yellow spurs on its unfurled wings pointing at me in accusation. She squawks like a high-pitched machine gun. It's not until I spy four speckled eggs lying on the grass that I deduce why these birds are so cranky.

While witnessing these pint-sized plovers defending their unhatched offspring is fascinating – if not a little disturbing – I've come to Yuraygir National Park to steal a glimpse of another bird. Numbering only 100, the coastal emu is teetering on the precipice of extinction. NSW National Parks have adopted it as the symbol of the 65-kilometre Yuraygir Coastal Walk, but despite their ubiquity on the signage, spotting an emu in person may be as tricky as stealing plover eggs.

The emu population has been in decline for the past 20 years due to fires during breeding season, predation by foxes, dingoes, feral pigs and dogs, and collisions with vehicles. Their habitat extends from

Angourie to Red Rock (the start and finish points of the four-day Yuraygir Coastal Walk), extending in a triangle to Tyndale near the Pacific Highway. Genetic testing has concluded that the coastal emus, separated from their inland counterparts by the Great Dividing Range, aren't a different species, although it's possible they could be a subspecies. There are physical differences between the two birds. The coastal emu is smaller and darker, which indicates it has been isolated for a long time.

The sky is unblemished and surfers ride two-metre swells as I set off from Angourie Point. The Yuraygir walk has been open for a couple of years now and encompasses two overlapping eco-systems: Temperate and subtropical. Most of the walk follows clean, curvaceous beaches; laconic villages punctuate the hike and are ideal places to replenish food and water supplies. There are seven national park campsites en route, all within spitting distance of the beach. There are also three river crossings that require boats to ferry you across. These have to be pre-arranged.

Yuraygir National Park was gazetted in 1980 and its gazettal ran in close conjunction with the cessation of sand mining. It may be three decades since

minerals were pilfered from the sand, but the legacy of the mining is still very evident today – not that you'd know by looking at the dunes, which are awash with green bitou plants. The bitou's yellow flowers may add colour to the scene, but these rapacious plants are neither native nor friendly. All native vegetation was removed during the mining, which caused the dunes to collapse. In a bid to stabilise dune structure, mining companies planted the South African bitou plant. It was a cheap, quick and environmentally irresponsible solution. Even though mining ceased in 1977, bitou is far from finished. The 50 000-odd seeds each plant produces annually are spread by birds and other animals and can stay viable in the soil for up to a decade.

I wind my way past clumps of bitou, along the coast to Shelley Beach and past patterned sandstone cliffs with pandanus plants clinging to their sheer edges. A tannin estuary snakes along a deserted beach, a distant cluster of clouds reflected in its sheen. I deviate inland and walk through coastal heathland. Pandanus plants stand like spirally sentinels either side of the track. Coral ferns sway in a sea breeze. I ascend gently until I'm standing atop Dirrangan Lookout where the landscape



*Tannin estuaries add colour to the beach.*  
Opposite: The endangered coastal emu.  
All photos by Dave Cauldwell

stretches kilometres before me. The flatness of the arced coastline is contrasted by Clarence Peak, which stands like a conical blip on the horizon. A local woman tells me there have been numerous UFO sightings over this peak.

There's nothing in the sky now except for an azure canvas. I descend to Shelley Beach, tracking over pocked rocks that house thousands of pools, the waters of which reflect the sun countless times. Sea snails have carved artistic and abstract patterns on the bottom of some pools, their sandy trails mixing with the red and grey of rocks and the white and yellow of sand. Below Shelley Headland there is a series of sea caves accessible only at low tide. The caves formed 10 000 years ago when falling sea levels exposed the headland. I enter one through a cavernous walkway and am immersed in a subterranean realm, the landscape of which seems like it's from a distant planet. Water drips and echoes. Rock ripples on the floor and ceiling in a mixture of pastel blues, browns and reds. I turn back and see the silhouette of a fellow walker and the jagged shape of the blackened cave mouth, both stark against the blue sky.

I exit the cave and hop onto a rocky platform. There used to be an iron stake



hammered into the rock here – not to chain up errant emus; diehard fishermen roped themselves to it in rough weather so they could carry on fishing and not get swept away by incoming waves. Further along, the remains of a petrified forest jut up from the sand, defiant stumps that have so far resisted the inclemency of the ocean.

On the shores of Lake Arragan (the first night's campsite) I get excited when I spot emu prints in the sand. There's roughly 1.5 metres between each one, which suggests that this particular emu was in a hurry. Coastal emus aren't as active as their inland relatives, which can travel up to 300 kilometres seasonally. The emus dotted along the Yuraygir coast don't need to lead such a nomadic lifestyle due to the smorgasbord of food available. They eat bugs, foliage, roots, flowers, ground herbs – even dirt, clay and sand. Pebbles and gravel helps their stomachs break down food.

Fading sunlight tinges peeling paperbark trees orange. I watch the sun dip below Lake Arragan. Its waters are filled with small fish and crustaceans and there is a plethora of birdlife here. The lake's brackish waters are intermittently flooded by the sea when high tides and stormy conditions erode sand from the beach. As the sand builds up, the lake becomes separated from the ocean once more. The 70-hectare lake extends nearly three kilometres upstream when it isn't inundated.

Just up from Lake Arragan is Red Cliff, perhaps the most scenic part of the walk where cliffs of grey, blue and red tower up from the beach. It's here that I encounter the cranky plovers. If I'd stumbled upon a coastal emu's nest, then there wouldn't be two birds defending it. Female emus are capricious and can have a couple of males on the go at once. If this is the case, the female will mate with both and then arbitrarily lay her eggs all over

the place. She leaves the male to incubate the eggs and he rolls them to a nesting site and sits there for around 55 days. During that time, the male doesn't eat or drink; he barely poos. The only moisture he gets is off surrounding plants. His metabolism slows right down and he loses around a third of his body weight, standing up just a few times a day to roll the eggs. Once they hatch, the male can stay with his chicks for up to 18 months, missing an entire breeding season to do so.

Somebody who knows about rearing chicks is volunteer wildlife carer Kerry Cranney, who nurses injured and orphaned coastal emus. She also incubates abandoned eggs. Her bush property five kilometres directly west of where I'm standing now at Red Cliff. The land is ideal for taking care of emus because it's in the forest and there are no nearby neighbours. Kerry is currently the guardian of 11 emus.

'In previous years, the most I've had in care was three at a time,' she says. 'This year was the first time that eggs came into my care – we don't normally find emu nests. The eggs came from a farmer who found a vacant nest while out harvesting his crop. There were 14 eggs when he rang. I knew a number of them were rotten because they were leaking smelly, gooey stuff. I discarded some and put the rest into an incubator.'

The eggs hatched over a two-week period. All of the chicks survived.

'If those eggs would've been with the father then I'm sure five of them wouldn't have survived,' Kerry says. 'The first five chicks were very mobile and the father's attention would've been with them, other than sitting on the nest and incubating the last five. Three or four of those last five had infections that required antibiotics. One was very unwell for the first couple of months.'

Caring for ten per cent of the entire



Clockwise from top left: Pandanus plants cling to a sandstone cliff; Walkers hike along Red Cliff; A spur-winged plover defends its eggs.

that houses Sandon – a small village with million-dollar houses and ocean views. Out to sea, I spot the sporadic sprouts of humpback whales. I watch as their tails hang in the air, a sign that they're arching their backs and rolling forward to dive. Humpbacks migrate north between May and July from the cold waters of Antarctica to the subtropical breeding grounds off the Queensland coast. These ones are making the long journey back south.

I've taken off my shoes and my sweaty feet appreciate the lap of incoming waves; occasionally I'm surprised as the odd wave gets frisky and splashes my crotch. For me, long stretches of beach walking are like moving meditations. With a seemingly endless curve of sand and the expanse of the ocean, this landscape is a gateway to the mind. The repetitive scenery reveals what's going on inside my head and how my attitude is shaping my experience. I could choose to focus on how hungry I am and how far away my designated lunch spot at Sandon is, but choosing to focus on this overshadows the subtle beauties of the coastline – the idiosyncrasies of shells and pebbles; patterns in the waves; and the noises of gliding seabirds that sing to the rhythm of the waves.

Sandon is the site of my first river crossing. I eat lunch while waiting for a man to arrive and ferry me across the river in his canoe.

It's approaching dusk as I arrive at Illaroo Camping Area. It's been a 23-kilometre day and I'm ready to stop walking. I unwittingly

coastal emu population requires a lot of dedication and maintenance. Each day Kerry is out in the emu enclosure collecting scat. Her 11 emus do more than 100 poos a day, which she removes to prevent a build up of parasites. There was a period earlier last year of eight months of solid rain. With 11 pairs of big emu feet continually pounding the pen, Kerry had to re-dig drains and shift a lot of mud back up hill.

Then there's the food preparation.

'Each night I cook up eight to ten kilos of vegetables along with dried grain mixed with pellets. I cook them because emus have a fast digestive system. In the wild they're eating green grains that are softer and more digestible. Grains you buy from poultry suppliers are dried and that goes straight through their system; they don't get any nutrients out of it.'

Kerry spends about \$100 a week on food at her own expense. WIRES, a wildlife rescue group licensed by National Parks in NSW, reimburses some of that cost.

I stop for a snack at Brooms Head, the first village en route and the site of an old Aboriginal camping area. Along the shoreline

there are natural rock walls that form a large enclosure. They are submerged at high tide and this was when Aboriginal fishermen filled the enclosure with pipis (bait) to lure fish. When the water went out, the fish were trapped. *Indigofera australis* leaves were mashed up and dropped into the water. When broken into pieces, the leaves release toxins that stun the fish. Fishermen cooked their haul on coals, or else rolled them in clay and baked them. The catch was rarely cleaned because once cooked the scales came off easily and the guts rolled into a ball and were easy to extract.

The tide is high this morning so I can't really see the traps. I climb to the summit of a small hill, passing a rocky outcrop – an old mining site where local tribes fashioned axe heads for hunting. They also traded them with tribes from Maclean and Grafton for koala and kangaroo skins, as well as food. The Yaegl people quarried greywacke and quartzite from Plover Island, a small landmass at the end of the seven-kilometre beach along which I'm walking. They used fishhooks and woomeras instead of more common barbed-bone and shell-tipped spears. Axe heads were ground into shape on rocks and sinew from kangaroo tongues was coiled to attach the axe heads to handles.

Plover Island is but a small dot on the horizon at the moment, as is the coastal arm



Walking on the beach to the backdrop of Red Cliff.

pitch my tent next to a spur-tailed plover 'nest', ie. a footpath, and get dive-bombed again. I leave the plovers to guard their unborn chicks and head down to the beach to emu spot. A couple of days before emu eggs hatch, the chicks have broken into the air space of the egg and their voices create a whistling sound as air travels through the porous egg. This whistling stimulates the other eggs in the nest to hatch. Emu hatchlings weigh between 350 and 420 grams; the emus Kerry is raising are around 30 kilograms now. Being a surrogate mother, she has to be wary of getting attached.

'Some carers love having their animals inside, cuddling and kissing them,' she says. 'I have to work hard to ensure these animals don't become so imprinted on me that they become a problem. I've known of emus that have been brought up like a family pet and on release they've turned into nuisances – some have even become threatening.'

Sexual imprinting is the most severe kind of imprint an emu can acquire. In such cases, a couple of years after release when the males are sexually active they return to the carer's property and, Kerry says, 'have tried humping people. We had one emu that was imprinted to motors. Every time a particular female got on his ride-on mower, he'd have a randy emu on his back. I helped National Parks move that one to a remote area, but it travelled back many kilometres and did the same thing. It ended up dying on the road.'

As part of her caring duties, Kerry has to touch the emus to treat injuries as well as tag and weigh them. She's careful not to let them get overly familiar with her touch and aims to establish trust, not dependency. After 12 months in her care, Kerry releases the emus into the wild.

'I don't just open the gate and ignore them,' she says. 'They tend to stay on my

property for a number of weeks afterwards, during which time I slowly reduce the amount of supplementary food they get each day so they become more dependent on native food.'

After three sun-drenched days I still haven't seen an emu. The final day's hike from Wooli to Red Rock is a grey affair and I cross the river by boat to embark on the most remote section of the walk. Checking tidal charts is essential along this section of coast (just south of Wooli) as it tracks along rocky outcrops, some of which are impassable at high tide or when the sea is rough. Today the tide is high, but not dangerously so. I rock hop over slippery, sharp rocks and through a grove of pandanus plants, passing a coiled up carpet snake. These non-venomous snakes like emu chicks, and one of Kerry's biggest challenges is to keep her chicks safe from predators like this.

'I have a constant problem with goannas and carpet pythons,' she says. 'Roaming domestic dogs are also an issue. Everyone for kilometres thinks I'm the crazy woman in the bush who's going to shoot their dog if it comes my way. And I have to work hard to maintain that image! I don't actually shoot dogs, but I do threaten them because the emus are too valuable.'

Wildlife SOS (Save Our Species) helped Kerry design an enclosure that is goanna- and carpet python-proof. When the chicks were very young she wasn't able to leave her property because she was constantly chasing off goannas. Wildlife SOS provided a large percentage of the materials to build the enclosure and National Parks officers helped construct it. National Parks also came up with additional funds and the manpower to extend Kerry's pen to incorporate part of her dam. The emus swim in it every day.

I'm nearing the end of the walk and am

about to go for a compulsory swim. Between me and the last stretch of beach that leads to Red Rock and the termination of the walk is a chest-deep estuary. I strip off, holding my rucksack aloft and trying not to fall over. A fellow walker stumbles on a submerged rock and ends up with a piece of shell embedded in his foot.

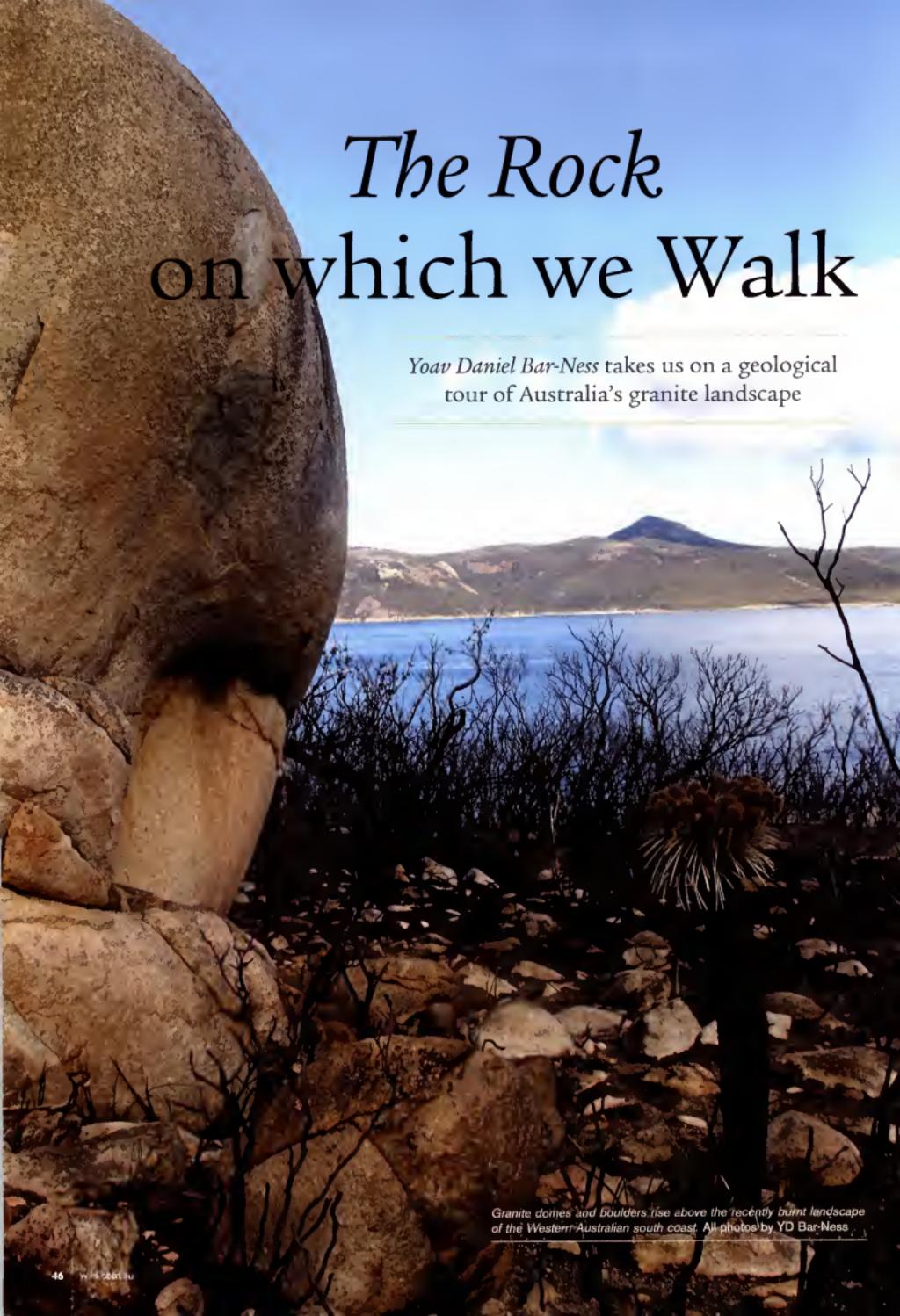
As Red Rock gets ever nearer, I realise that I'm not going to see any coastal emus this time. But with people like Kerry Cranney around, in coming years there's a good chance that the coastal emus won't be so endangered and their presence here will be as noticeable as a dive-bombing plover. **W**



The author would like to thank Debra Novak, Kerry Cranney and Jenny Massie for their invaluable assistance with this article. For more information, including boat crossings, see [clarencecouncil.com.au](http://clarencecouncil.com.au)

# *The Rock* on which we Walk

*Yoav Daniel Bar-Ness takes us on a geological tour of Australia's granite landscape*



Granite domes and boulders rise above the recently burnt landscape of the Western Australian south coast. All photos by YD Bar-Ness

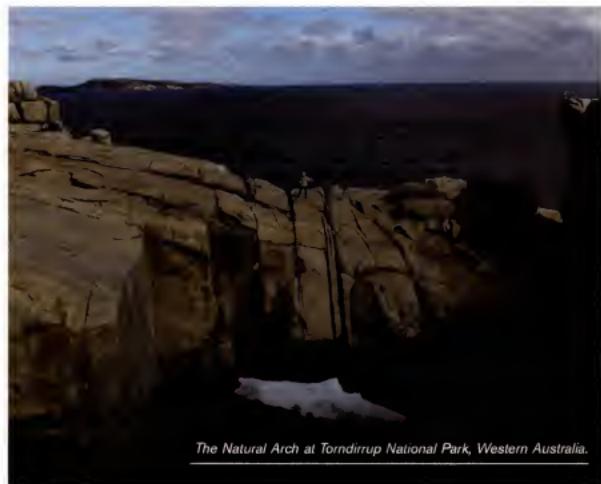
**W**hat makes Australia? What forms the mass of the continent? From the widest of perspectives – geological – the landscape is made of one material: Granite.

Let's walk across this ancient landscape and look for its characteristic domes and slabs. We'll contrast it to the younger, fire-born volcanic rocks, and to the slowly grown sandstones and limestone. We'll visit some of the most famous and memorable granite terrains, including Freycinet Peninsula in Tasmania, the Bunya Mountains in Queensland, and the extensive Darling Scarp of the southwest corner of the continent. We can think about how this most ancient of rocks crumbles, cracks, and flakes into the shapes on which we walk, and make the conceptual link between the ancient Earth and the direction of our footsteps. We'll think about the way in which this rock conserves and hides wilderness, in the crevices and slabs of these massive domes.

#### The stuff of continents

Granite is one of the major materials of the outermost layer of the Earth, and is mostly composed of silicon dioxide, or quartz. If basalts are the heavy, dark rocks of the ocean floor, then granites are the lighter, brighter rocks of the continents. Both of these materials are molten in the Earth's interior and the continents literally float upon the heavier basaltic rock. They occasionally bump into each other to form supercontinents such as Gondwana, of which Australia was once part. We only see the oceanic material on dry land in places such as highland Tasmania, or western Victoria, where tectonic activity has thrust it up to the landscape.

Generally, if you are on land, there is granite somewhere below you. It is often obscured by younger formations, sandstone and limestone are materials laid down when the landscape was underwater, and soil and sediments were deposited in more recent times on dry land. Where this basal continental granite is exposed, as a vast, flat, thin-soiled landscape, it is known as a continental shield. The vast lands of the Canadian North, southern Africa, eastern South America, and southwestern Australia are continental shields.



*The Natural Arch at Torndirrup National Park, Western Australia.*

Granite uplands are lifted by the slow rise of underground bubbles of rock, known as batholiths. The most popular analogy is to visualise these bubbles moving upwards through the molten earth like the blobs in a lava lamp. They slowly push their way up on to the surface, and stand above the surrounding land as domes. You can see only the uppermost section of these massive, round bubbles: the domes are just the crowns of the batholith. In other mountain ranges, such as the Sierra Nevada of California, the uplift of an entire section of continental crust juts the granite high into the sky. Over time, these mountain ranges can also erode and form granite domes.

#### The domes

Isolated granite domes are known as inselbergs, after the German for 'island mountains'. They can rise out of the landscape, alone or as ridges, and are often too steep for the accumulation of the forests, soils and sediments that could hide from sight. Each of these inselbergs has experienced fantastic lengths of time and unimaginable extremes of the elements, all of which have left their mark. The domes that we can visit today have been radically altered over their vast ages.

While it is impossible to know exactly what form any particular piece of granite took when it was first exposed to the air, we can imagine that they were simple shapes, resembling ovals or spheres. Over time, however, these domes are worn down, cracked, gouged, carved, and submerged. The rocks of Western Australia's Darling Scarp are two and half billion years old, more than half the age of the planet. In

this timeframe, they have been subjected to inconceivable energies. To the careful observer, this history can be read in the shape of the rocks.

The most obvious dynamic in the formation of a granite inselberg is the exfoliation of slabs. As the titanic forces that lifted the batholith find their mechanical release, and as the rock heats and cools over time, curved slabs flake off. You could imagine these slabs to be like the outermost peel of an onionskin. These slabs may slide, or fall off the side of the dome, leaving it slightly steeper, and slightly smaller. For a certain period of time, they will stay in place, forming a foothold and a shelter that serves as habitat for plants and animals. These slabs can accumulate as boulders beneath the dome, or may stand in the same spot to be worn away by the elements.

Running water gouges the rock. At the upper portions of the dome, these will be shallow channels, but on the lower slopes, they may be sizeable ravines. If there is a depression on the summit of the dome, there may be a small pool. Wind blows over the rocks, carrying water droplets and grains of sand, and sculpts the rock into beautiful curves, such as those at Remarkable Rocks on Kangaroo Island, South Australia.

When the Earth is cold, glacial ice may form on the rocks. Some of the most spectacular terrain in the world is made of glacially carved granites – the Fiordlands of New Zealand, for example, or the mountain cliffs of Yosemite. In low-lying Australia, glacial terrain is rare, found only in the highest mountains of the Alps, or in the Central Plateau of Tasmania.



*At the Hazard Mountains in Tasmania's Freycinet National Park.*

### Coastal scenery

When the Earth is warm, the oceans rise and reclaim the dry land. The granite rocks that we see on the seashore are today on the dividing line, but over time scales of millions of years, they can submerge and recede. The salt water can further modify the structure of the granite. When the inselbergs are steep, and the ocean waves are strong, the coastline may contain fine, sandy beaches beneath rugged cliffs. You can discover this sort of terrain at the Tordirrup National Park, near Albany, Western Australia, or at Freycinet National Park, on the east coast of Tasmania.

Rachel Jaeschke, ranger at Freycinet National Park, mentions that many visitors to the park don't realise that the famously picturesque white sands of Wineglass Bay are at the foot of such sheer rocky scenery.

'When they see the mountains, and how spectacular they are, there's an element of surprise,' she says. 'They don't expect these beautiful granite mountains to come out of the ocean like they do.'

However, all things on Earth, no matter how massive, return to the ocean. Throughout the park, the nature of each cliff and mountain helps to determine the character and feel of each of the beaches. 'People really enjoy visiting the different beaches because of the sand is so different, depending on where they go,' she continues. The sparkling sands are made of this mountain granite, ground down through coastal processes and wave action, creating beautiful white sand.

### Study by walking

One of the best ways to learn something is

to experience it, up close, and to explore it from all angles. Geology, for the bushwalker, becomes an intensely personal and immediate consideration. Like the builder creates the interior space for the decorators, and like the theatre carpenter sets the stage for the actor, so does the landscape formation underlie and determine our movement on the wild tracks. Let's think of the granite from different positions on the dome, starting with the uplands.

Large granite domes form steep-sided and solid uplands, and these topographical islands are a refuge and habitat for many elements of biodiversity. For example, the Bunya Mountains have a cooler climate than the subtropical lowlands surrounding them, and can provide a home for the bunya pine forest. On the highest domes of the Darling Scarp, the sun-baked slabs hide a habitat for lichens, herbs, and reptiles that could not compete with the eucalyptus forests surrounding them.

Where the ravages of time have attacked the smooth slabs of the summit, creating crevices, crannies, and nooks, life gains a foothold. Green plants and carpets of moss grow in these protected places, and provide the basis of life for the other organisms. Raptors circle overhead, their wings catching the rising thermal air from the sun-baked rock.

The rock itself can also be a lesson about our past biogeographic connections. The shield known to geologists as the Yilgarn Craton is the basic material of which the Darling Scarp of southwest Western Australia is made. More than 100 million years ago, this corner of the continent was the meeting point with Antarctica and India. Travellers in



*A trekker walks below the massive coastal boulders of Elephant Rocks, on the Western Australian south coast.*



these regions can see similarly ancient and eroded granite rocks. In India, the famous climbing boulders of Hampi and the tall granite mountains of Karnataka and Andhra are fundamentally the same rock as that of the hills just behind Perth.

#### On the slabs

It is here on the steep sides that we must cling carefully to the rock, and learn to appreciate the rubber soles of our shoes. Granite slopes are the terrain in which we much trust, with confidence, the friction of our footwear. Here, the sharp treads and texture of the walking boot serve us less well than the flat and malleable rubber of the climbing shoe.

The steep sides of the inselberg are relatively easy to ascend, moderately difficult to traverse, and quite arduous to descend. We will, like the plants and animals that seek to find a place to live, seek a foothold in the slightest crack, water channel, or depression in the rock. These intricacies of the rock surface may allow us a positive grip for our hands, but when we cling to these textures, it is easy to lose the confidence of our feet.

There is a particular phrase used in the rock climbing guidebooks – ‘run out’. This means that the climber must friction up a long distance of smooth slab before finding a feature where a rope can be secured. This may be easy, yet the risks are real. When you find yourself on a massive slab of granite, keep confidence in your rubber-soled shoes.

#### At the base

The water collects at the base of the hill, and it is here that the soil creeps up to the granite itself. There are the smashed remains

of slabs that exfoliated from the dome above, and we can explore the incidental caves and shelters beneath these slabs.

As we walk around the edge of the granite, the unique nature of each dome will be apparent. We may, at the base of a steep mountain in Victoria’s Wilson’s Promontory, look up to see that it is too sheer to ascend easily; or at the edge of a flat granite dome along Western Australia’s Bibbulmun Track, discover that we can walk clear across it with ease and comfort.

Some granite mountain bases touch the ocean, and must be visited by boat. Daniel Moss, a kayak guide on Tasmania’s east coast, describes the attraction of the coastal granite landscape. He describes how visitors ‘become fixated upon [the] famous pink granite. Whether it’s paddling into a secret granite cove, watching the evening’s sunset glow over its various pillars and ledges, or just admiring the stunning area beneath the magical Hazards mountain range’.

#### Walking the granite

Granite is ubiquitous in this southern island continent, although you may have to do a bit of investigation to find it beneath the forests, soil, sedimentary rocks, and cities of Australia. Here is a short list of famously scenic and accessible places to explore granite scenery.

**The Darling Scarp:** The Darling Scarp is a mountain range 1000 kilometres long, uplifted by a geological fault, on the southwest coast of Australia. It rises above the Swan Coastal Plain to the domed summit of Mt Cooke, 582 metres high, and in this granite landscape can be found the jarrah forest, a critical element of the South West biodiversity hotspot.

**Wilson’s Promontory National Park:** In east Victoria, Wilson’s Prom sticks out into Bass Strait and is the point on the Australian mainland farthest south. An immensely popular destination with Melburnians, it is geologically similar to Flinders Island and the northwest Tasmanian coast.

**Bunya Mountains:** The Bunya Mountains, northwest of Brisbane, are the last sizable refuge of the Araucaria bidwillii, or the bunya pine. This tree has survived, almost unchanged, for at least two hundred million years, and thrives in the cooler temperatures of this granite mountain range.

**Mt Kosciuszko:** Australia’s highest peaks are made of granite. If you travel on the plateau at the summit of Kosciuszko National Park, you can see glacially carved terrain and mountains of ice-shattered and storm-weathered rocks.

**The Dampier Archipelago:** In the northwest of Australia, a collection of steep-sided granite islands rise from the tropical waters. This continental rock provides an important habitat for marine biodiversity.

**Torndirrup National Park:** At Albany, Western Australia’s major south coast city, a long ridge of granite hills (Torndirrup) strikes out into the ocean and creates a spectacular harbour. Here, beaches lie hidden beneath steep domes, and Antarctic waves smash into the rocks, forming such natural curiosities as the Arch and the Blowhole.

**Porongurup National Park:** To the north of Albany, the granite domes of the Porongurups rise in sheer slabs; from their summits one can see the sharp peaks of the Stirling Ranges. This mountain range contains the easterntmost tall eucalyptus forests in the state.

**Girraween National Park and the Granite Belt:** The Darling Downs of Queensland is an uplifted region of rock domes with high botanical conservation value. The mountains of the Girraween National Park contain the second largest single monolith in Australia, after Uluru.

**Cape Le Grande National Park:** At Esperance, on the south coast of Western Australia, coastal granite can be seen in steep domes above the Great Australian Bight. One of these mountains, Frenchman’s Peak, is crowned by a massive arch, said to resemble the hat of a fashionable Frenchman.

**Freyicket National Park:** Over on the east coast of Tasmania, the orange Hazard Mountains of Freycinet National Park provide some of the most vertical of Australia’s granite scenery. A quick scramble up the slabs of Mount Amos will provide the walker with a view down to Wineglass Bay, an iconic and picturesque beach of white sand and wild forest. **W**

# A Beginner's Guide to Rogaining

*Joel Mackay* has pointers to get you into a sport that encompasses endurance, planning, navigation, and teamwork – and happens to be an Australian invention

It's 5.30am and still dark. The night had been cool and clear, with a full moon lighting up the landscape for much of the night and a sky full of stars on display whenever we paused to look up. We walk along a narrow creek decorated with moss-covered rocks, our headtorches picking out grass trees and ferns on each bank. We see a second creek joining from the left, so we set a bearing of 110° and head up the slope to the right, moving through widely spaced old-growth eucalyptus. After climbing for ten minutes, the forest thins out and we reach a ridgeline. All makes sense with the map – the ridge is running roughly north-south and is running gently downhill as we look north. We head north, working our way around rocky outcrops and after 200 metres (according to my partner's pace counting) we start to climb again. Another 100 metres brings us to the summit of a knoll – bare other than for a solitary gum tree. With the usual flood of relief, I spot the orange and white flag dangling from a bough – 80 more points for our score. As we use the electronic punch to record our visit, the sun emerges above the horizon and the landscape is laid out before us – the spurs and gullies of the national park to the west and rolling farmland with patches of bushland to the east. Fantastic. Next stop – checkpoint 43 – the description says "Watercourse: top of a 20-metre waterfall". I like it already. We are rogaining – the sport of long distance cross-country navigation.

#### What is rogaining?

In a rogaine, you and your team of two to five turn up and around three hours prior to the start of the event, are presented with a topographic map of the surrounding area. On this map are marked up to 60 or so locations (checkpoints) at which an orange and white flag will be hung, along with a device for recording your visit. Each checkpoint has a score that is loosely related to its degree of difficulty – how far away it is, how tricky the navigation is, or maybe just how spectacular the view is. There is plenty to choose from. You then plan the route you will take, estimating the distance you think you can cover and maximising either your score or the level of scenic beauty or minimising the hills you have to climb – or whatever combination you prefer. After a short briefing, the hooter sounds and you are off, using the firetrails, singletacks, animal tracks and a healthy dose of cross-country travelling to execute your point-gathering plan – making sure that you get back to the start for the final hooter (don't want to lose hard earned points for a late return).

#### Rogaining associations

Every state and territory in Australia has a rogaining association and it is these organisations that put on the events – usually around six a year or so each. The associations are typically run entirely by volunteers, and one of the good things about this situation is that entry fees for

their events tend to be lower than for events that are trying to make a profit. This does mean of course that rogaining associations are always on the lookout for volunteers who are interested in assisting at events – whether that be in the capacity of setting or vetting courses, helping with event administration or chopping vegetables in the hash house for dinner. Volunteering is a great way to meet people and find out how the sport really works and it is the efforts of 'ordinary' members that help to keep the sport alive.

#### Event types and lengths

Events can be almost any length, but are most commonly between three and 24 hours long. The size of the course will vary accordingly, with 24-hour courses sometimes covering up to 150 square kilometres or so. There are also

several variations on the rogaining theme, including cyclegaines (mountain bike required), metrogaines, held in urban areas, or canoe- and skigaines (you get the general idea). Events run by the New South Wales Rogaining Association in my home turf typically attract anything from 150 to more than 600 participants; shorter events tend to be most popular. They can be near major centres – NSWRA events are held in places like the Blue Mountains and the Watagans – or in more far-flung places. For example, Australia hosted the World Championships in 2006 with a fantastic course in the Warrumbungles, and the 2007 Australian Championships were held in the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs.

Even though there can be a lot of variation in length, size, terrain and the number of points available, one thing is

invariant – there is always a feed included in the event fees. For shorter events of three to eight hours, this will generally consist of a meal at the end of the event, but for 24-hour events, which start and finish at lunchtime, the event headquarters (the hash house) will be serving hot and cold food from the early evening all through the night and through to the next day.

I always think this is one of the nicest things about rogaining. It is a sport where everyone gets to take part in the same event at the same time and, because every team chooses their own route, you are as likely to bump into the winners during the middle of the event as a team of novices. At the hash house, you can be rubbing shoulders with world champions or a family who are reading a map for the first time. I have never seen a sport where people of all abilities mix so much at events.

The format allows you to be as competitive as you like – you can go for broke with ultralight gear and drive yourself into the ground or you can pack a picnic lunch and take a leisurely stroll. In 24-hour events, some teams will push themselves through sleep deprivation at 4am to grab a few extra checkpoints and others will sit by the campfire at the hash house in the evening (during the event) with a bottle of port, chatting about the successes and glaring blunders of the day's rogaining, and planning their route for the next morning (that will be undertaken only after a kip and a hearty breakfast – cooked up by the event organisers of course).

The most special times in a rogaine for me come in the 24-hour events. The first is the period in late afternoon when the whole forest seems somehow very calm, like everyone is settling down for the evening. The light is fantastic as well, and you are usually far enough into the event that you haven't seen any other teams for an hour or two. You really have a sense of being out in the wilderness and having 'gotten away from it all'. The other great time is when the sun comes up in the morning. Navigating through the wee hours of the morning is hard on the brain and body (and hence why many people are sensible enough not to spend the whole 24 hours out on the course in a 24-hour event) but you get such a lift when the sun comes over the horizon and lights up the bush.

#### Gear

In general, the gear that you need for a rogaine closely resembles what you would take on a bushwalk or trail run of the same length: a day pack, water (or electrolyte), snacks (or more substantial food for longer



*The author poses over a map in the 2009 Orsone Boulders Spring Rogaine.  
Inset: An example of a rogaining competition map indicating checkpoints.*

All photos supplied by Joel Mackay; map kindly supplied by ACTRA

events), basic first aid, whistle, whatever knickknacks you normally take into the bush (pocket knife, for example) and appropriate clothing for the conditions. On longer events, you will need a headtorch for night-time navigation.

And of course you need a compass so that you can navigate your way across the terrain (I always take a spare – there's nothing like losing your compass in the middle of an event). The one piece of gear you can't use during the event is any sort of navigational electronica – so no GPS units, altimeters or the like.

#### Map-reading and navigation

Needless to say, rogaining also allows you to develop map-reading and navigational skills – and with those skills comes a great sense of satisfaction when you find you are able to navigate cross-country by yourself with only a topographic map and compass. It is amazing how my appreciation of the landscape changed once I found that I could traverse it with those basic tools. These skills are at least as important as speed and fitness in being a good rogaier – I came into the sport from a running background and initially took the headless chicken approach, running as fast as I could between checkpoints. This inevitably compromised my ability to navigate accurately, and I would often have the experience of running past a couple of gnarled looking rogainers who were almost certainly drawing the pension and were walking through the bush at a steady but moderate pace, only to find when I eventually arrived at the next checkpoint (after taking a somewhat circuitous route), the same pair would already be leaving.

#### Safety

Some people I talk to about rogaining think I'm mad, what with all of those snakes and spiders out there in the bush. I grew up in New Zealand, famous in some circles as one of those countries that's essentially bereft of venomous creatures. This situation creates a certain mindset, and if you had told me all those years ago that one of the main activities I would be taking part in 20 years on would involve crashing headlong through the Australian bush, I would have scoffed. When Kiwis aren't trying desperately to find something that they can beat Australians at (I hear the NZ macramé team is training hard for the Oceania championships this year), they are marvelling at the land across the ditch that is overflowing with things that can't wait to sink their teeth, tentacles or stingers into you. The funny thing is that in the 12 years that I have been rogaining

– covering probably 30 to 40 events of between three and 30 hours, I think I have seen a snake about twice – and both times it was running away faster than me. In fact, I have only ever heard of one snake bite in a rogaine – and that was a visiting American, although I'm not sure what that tells you.

Most times when I go bushwalking outside of a rogaine, I pretty much always stick to marked trails because I know that someone has already done the hard work and realised that a particular route would be rewarding – and even possible for that matter (that is, not full of unscaleable cliffs or impenetrable undergrowth). In a rogaine, people have already been out there on the course and you know that if you go off-trail in that area, you will be able to make reasonable progress. Not only that, but you know that there will be a safety patrol out on the course who should be able to help you if you get into trouble (either navigational or medical).

With rogaining, you often get to explore areas that wouldn't be easy to get to outside of an organised event (for example, private property or remote areas with no tracks). And even the whole idea of going off track at all is quite a leap for most people used to bushwalking on marked trails. But once you start doing it, you get into a whole new world and are much more likely to see interesting things – wombat burrows (with wombats, if you

are lucky), echidnas, sugar gliders, unspoilt creeks and gullies, wild flowers and rock formations – not to mention flocks of kangaroos and wallabies.

So, if you love getting out into the bush, want to see some parts of the country that you will never see otherwise, and are keen to develop your navigational skills in a relaxed and supportive environment, check out the website of your local rogaining association, dust off that compass, grab a friend or two and give it a whirl!

#### Rogaining fast facts

- Rogaining was officially recognised as a new sport in Melbourne in 1976, even though elements of rogaining have been in place in various competitions since 1947.
- Its name comes from the first names of three founders: Rod Phillips, Gai Davis (nee Phillips), and Neil Phillips (RoGaiNe).
- The World Rogaining Championship's location is chosen by the International Rogaining Federation. The first World Rogaining Championship was held in 1992 in Beechworth, Victoria. Around 200 teams participated. The tenth World Rogaining Championship was held earlier this year in Prebuz, Czech Republic.
- The World Rogaining Championship was held biennially from 1992-2012 but from here on in, the championship will be held annually. Russia will host the competition in 2013 and the US in 2014.



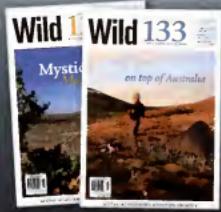
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# Cook-Free Meals

No need to go hungry in times of Total Fire Ban.

Andrew Davison has some ideas to keep you full in the heat

**I**t was with great reservation we even decided to get into the car and drive past Merrijig and into sheepyard flats that Friday night. 'She's gunna be a scorcher this weekend,' remarked the barman at the Mansfield Hotel, as we tucked into our greasy counter meals.

Certainly, the forecast suggested it; it also informed that a total fire ban was to be enforced over the weekend. But relief was to come with showers on Sunday afternoon and this was the decider for us. The first few days we would take it easy along the Howqua River flats, before we spent the following days of cooler weather

traversing the skyline from The Bluff, to King Billy and Mt Clear and on to Mt McDonald and back down to the car.

However, we could not even light a stove in the first few days and possibly as the days heated again after the cool change. Therefore, we packed a range of meals that were suited to the conditions we were to face. We needed a minimum of two days of cook-free meals. Breakfast was easy – milk powder and cereal – and lunch was to be simple pickles, spreads and cheeses on unleavened bread. Dinners were pre-cooked or fulfilling uncooked meals.

In addition to 'Lentil and Carrot Salad'

(found in *Wild* issue 126), here are some of the meals we took with us on the trip.

Barley is a great filling grain, but the reason it doesn't make it into too many bushwalking menus is because it takes 20–30 minutes to cook. However, I have found that barley is extremely easy to dry and can be rehydrated by soaking in water for a few hours. Drying barley is simply a matter of spreading the cooked and drained grains on a clean tea towel covering a wire rack, and sit in the sun for a day or two. You can speed the process by using a food dehydrator or placing the rack in the oven set at 60–70°C with the door slightly ajar.





Barley salad. Photo: Andrew Davison

## FALAFEL WRAP

Serves 2

Falafel is a spicy blend of legumes formed into a dumpling and deep-fried. Found in most supermarkets, falafel premix is the easiest way to prepare the dumplings. It is a process to do at home before leaving for the track head; it is as simple as adding water and deep-frying. Pre-cooked, the dumplings will last four to five days in the centre of your pack.

- 12 pre-made falafels
- 6 pieces of unleavened bread
- 3 dessert spoons of tahini (sesame paste)
- 2 cloves of garlic, crushed
- 2 dessert spoons of lemon juice
- 15 olives
- 10 dried tomatoes in oil
- 1 bunch fresh parsley

### At home

Slice the olives and the dried tomatoes and pack together.

Mix the garlic and lemon juice into the tahini and pack in a watertight container.

### In the field

Lay out the unleavened bread. Place two falafels along one edge, drizzle with the tahini mix and top with the olives, tomatoes and finely chopped parsley. Now roll the bread tightly around the contents.

### Tip

To grate carrot, make many shallow cuts close together down the length of the carrot, then at a right angle to the cuts, slice or peel the carrot along its length. This should easily create long fine strips of carrot.

To finely chop parsley, hold a tight bunch in your hand and use the scissors of a multi-tool to cut it.

## BARLEY SALAD

Serves 2

This salad is really a meal in itself. I find it is best to soak the barley overnight and then drain and carry it in a plastic bag until needed for lunch or dinner.

- 1 cup of barley cooked and dried
- 1 teaspoon each of coriander and cumin powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of sweet paprika
- Juice of a lemon
- Juice of an orange
- 1 teaspoon of balsamic vinegar
- 2 dessert spoons of olive oil
- 2 carrots grated
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of crushed walnuts
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of dried cranberries
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of dates pitted and cut into slivers
- Small bunch of parsley (optional)

### At home

Cook barley in boiling salted water until tender (20–30 min). Drain and dry.

In a small watertight container pack the coriander, cumin, sweet paprika, lemon and orange juice, balsamic vinegar and olive oil together.

### In the field

Soak the barley until plump and tender. Grate or finely slice carrot and chop the parsley. Combine all ingredients, mix well and serve.



# ...NOTES OF THE BELLBIRD...RUINING AND RINGING

*Steve Van Dyck gets mad – BMAD – at the surprisingly destructive bellbird*

Some remarkable things are best enjoyed in remarkably small doses. Rollercoasters, Botox, Chanel No. 5, Pachelbel's Canon, although some brides happily glide down the aisle accompanied by paralysing doses of more than just the music. Have you ever considered that our beloved bellbird (*Manorina melanophrys*) might also belong in that class of small fixes?

Most of us fell in love with bellbirds at an early age when the notion of 'excess' was as impossible to conceptualise as the need for superannuation. So, later in life, whenever we hear their calls we are mentally transported back to cool wet gullies, ferny thickets and gurgling streams; magical places into which we would now happily empty our retirement purse.

But wait up. Bellbirds are as quickly addictive as smack. When they fill the air it takes only an open car window to induce a euphoria from which you never really recover; a warm feeling of relaxation, a dissipation of tension and anxiety. And that rapture is further enhanced by mystification. It is humanly impossible to link that echoing metallic 'tink' to a small bird and, additionally, it is almost as impossible to tell where the tinks are coming from, as if a network of tiny, randomly firing electronic speakers were suspended throughout the forest. So the inoculation is surreal but the exposure usually ends there, with just the memory smouldering on.

Stay a bit longer and you'd catch a glimpse of a bellbird plummeting into the thick understorey, and it's a shock to see it's the same shape, though nearly half the size,



A psyllid nymph, sans lerp. Photo: Andy Burton

of its more familiar parkland cousin, the Noisy Miner (*Manorina melanocephala*), but in bright olive green, with fluoro-orange feet and a crimson tick of bare skin behind the eye. Then, while you're beginning to feel slightly uneasy about that unfortunate family link with the related Mafioso miner, you'd notice something between the tinks: Silence.

Though silence had something to do with your initial impression of peace inside the bellbird colony, there is a discordant reason for it. Bellbirds, beauty personified in emerald dress and silver voice, are thugs. And the silence beyond the crystal pings is the smug vacuum where all other birds have been forced from the territory. Living in colonies that operate in a series of sub-groups (called coteries) where monogamous pairs breed cooperatively with related non-breeders, numbers of individuals vary from as few as eight birds up to around 200, living at densities of one

to 12 birds per hectare. But as many as 3000 have been recorded living in 300 hectares near Merimbula in the far South Coast of NSW. There, in 2006, as many as 2000 were caught and culled from just 40 hectares of forest.

Culling bellbirds! It sounds like clubbing baby seals? Didn't Henry Kendall call 'the silver-voiced bell birds, the darlings of daytime' in the poem we baby-boomers learnt in the 1950s and still recite ad nauseum every time we hear a ping? Clearly there is trouble in Paradise.

And it's the Baby Boomers, still in love with the small green birds we'd never actually seen, who are hardest hit by the undeniable truth that bellbirds are now known to be responsible for extreme forest ecosystem degradation and dieback in an increasing number of wet and dry sclerophyll forests in eastern Australia. The first paragraph of the newspaper article announcing the cull of bellbirds near



A tasty sugary lerps on a eucalyptus leaf. Photo: Andy Burton

Merimbula was a dramatic two-liner saying that to the owner of the property 'the tinkling of bellbirds is the noise of his forest being killed'. And not only in southern NSW.

A few weeks ago, I was being driven down Cunningham's Gap, a steep scenic pass over the Great Dividing Range between the Darling Downs and the Fassifern Valley, Queensland. I idly remarked to my old friend and champion-ornithologist, Ian Gynther, how trashed and devastated the forest looked, not just in one patch, but nearly all the way down, the canopy an open skeleton of ugly dead grey sticks and the understory a thick tangle of shrubs and weeds. With a flick of a switch he had my window sliding down and, as if in response to the flick of another switch, off I went with the familiar Kendall quote, 'the notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing'. The air was full of bellbirds. 'It's them,' he said. 'Bell miner-associated dieback, better known as BMAD!'

Bellbirds (called bell miners in the old days because their calls were supposed to resemble the sounds made by mining hammers at the workface) are the main protagonists in a complicated vicious cycle that is both highly destructive and clearly variable from place to place. Their belligerence toward other birds stems from a ganja-farmer obsession with cultivating and guarding treetop treasure – lerps.

Lerps are the crusty protective scales produced by tiny sap-sucking bugs called psyllids (pronounced 'sillid'), some species

of which live only under eucalypt leaves. The lerps are dry, waxy, lentil-sized, cockle-shelled umbrellas, built from sugary secretions that ooze from the psyllid's anus. The psyllid nymph hides under the frame of its secreted, protective lerp and the two grow together as the bug sucks away at the leaf under its feet.

As astonishing as it sounds for these plastic-looking lids, lerps are remarkably good to eat, being composed of dextrin, amylose, amylopectin and complex polymers of glucose. Whenever I come across lumpy leaves within reach I pull off a spray and nibble on the waxy sequins. Most of the time the flavour evokes smouldering memories of communion bread and church candles, but sometimes the image gets muddled when I remember what part of the psyllid produced the lerp.

Apart from keeping the sun, rain and most predators off a sucking psyllid's back, the lerp, as any gardener knows, keeps insect sprays out as well. With this degree of protection, lerp-producing psyllids, when they occur in large numbers, can cause extensive defoliation and even death of the trees.

Bellbirds eat the lerps and drive away all other birds irrespective of whether they are lerp-eaters or not. The 'driving away' is not so much achieved by individual attacks (remember they are a small bird), but by collective mobbing and calling. The underlying reason behind the 'softer than slumber and sweeter than singing' calls is to repel other birds. Recent research has

shown that intruders associate this call with an increased risk of being bullied. But it is not the number of bellbirds present, rather some minimum rate of tinkling that is enough to convince other species that bellbirds occupy a site worth avoiding. Many humans also register this minimum rate of pinging above which the capacity to live with bellbirds becomes unbearable.

The value of lerps as a food resource has not escaped the attention of an air force of other birds (thornbills, weebills, pardalotes, whistlers, honeyeaters) but, whereas they snap into both lerp and psyllid with their strong beaks, the bell miners prize off the lerp with their tongue and leave the psyllid (to grow another shell). So, with the suite of other psyllid-eaters excluded, the uncontrolled insects go berserk and suck the daylight out of the gums. And voila, BMAD, but not in all species of eucalypt and not all colonies of bellbirds.

Not loving bellbirds is almost impossible for my generation; Henry Kendall and John Gould made us hard-shelled and irrational members of the Bird Lovers League. However, while having a shave the other morning I clearly heard bellbirds on the hill above our fence! Close to my trees! They were scouts from a recently established colony that's busy defoliating grey gums just up the road. At that moment I think I twigged to the tink in my armour.

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Dr Steve Van Dyck is the Senior Curator of Vertebrates at the Queensland Museum.

# Cathedral Mountain circuit

Cam Walker explores a lesser-known section of Tasmania's Central Plateau

This trip is in an area that links the Walls of Jerusalem with the Overland Track in the Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair National Park. It is a great introduction to a wild, mostly forested area, which generally has unmaintained rather than official

tracks. It is a moderate four-day round trip, and passes through a dazzling range of landscapes. Highlights include the old Pencil Pine forests of the Cathedral Plateau, some of the grandest views in Tasmania as you peer from Cathedral Mountain into the

Cradle Mountain Park, wonderful old rainforests and a spectacular camping spot at Lake Myrtle. This is a trip for parties with a lot of experience in the backcountry. An EPIRB is recommended.

## WHEN TO GO

Late summer and autumn are best in terms of stable weather. Higher areas tend to be snow-covered in winter.

## SAFETY / WARNINGS

This is remote country. It is very easy to lose the track in a number of places and you will need good navigation skills.

Some tracks are not marked on the maps, and some are incorrectly marked, especially Moses Track in the section from Mersey Forest Road to Chapter Lake.

The middle third of the walk is largely through buttongrass-dominated valleys so make sure you keep an eye open for snakes and know how to deal with snakebite.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

The various guides to the Cradle Mountain and Walls of Jerusalem all mention the main track between the Walls and the Never Never. There are also good basic notes available at [www.tastracks.webs.com/merseyvalley.htm](http://www.tastracks.webs.com/merseyvalley.htm)

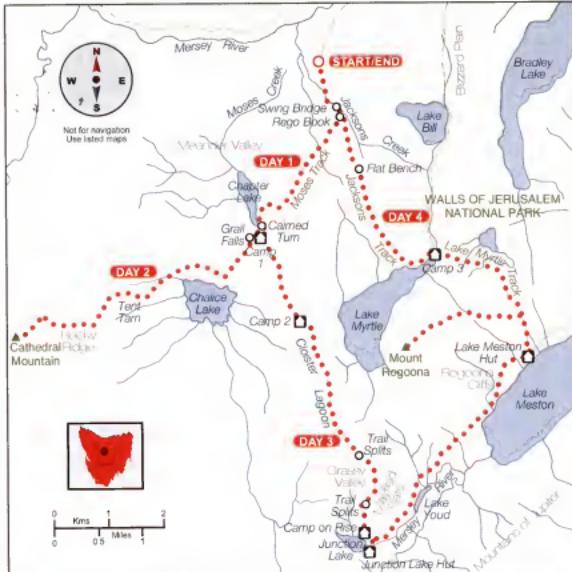
## PERMITS

Permits are not required but you do need a Parks Pass. Only fuel stoves are allowed. This region is managed as remote backcountry, so pack out all your rubbish and be very mindful of human waste, especially around the lakes.

Campsites are few and far between and suited to a small group. The best-sized group for the walk as described is up to four people with two tents. There are larger campsites available – at Junction Lake and the hut at Lake Meston – if you have more than two tents.

## ACCESS

The track starts at the very end of the Mersey Forest Road, accessed from the road between Deloraine and Cradle Mountain and is suitable for 2WD vehicles. The area can be assessed via bus services. If your dates are flexible you can often join in on a pre-booking in order to reduce the trip price. Note that the drop off point is the end of the Mersey Forest Road, not the Walls of Jerusalem tracks.  
[www.tigerwilderness.com.au/bush](http://www.tigerwilderness.com.au/bush)  
[www.outdoortasmania.com.au](http://www.outdoortasmania.com.au)



## The Walk



Near the summit of Cathedral Mountain, looking into the Cradle Mountain national park  
Mt Ossa on the left, and Cradle Mountain on top right. All photos by Cam Walker

**THE WALK**

There are various ways you can do this walk. With an early start it is possible to make a camp on Cathedral Mountain, and then push on to larger campsites at Junction Lake on the second day.

**DAY 1****Mersey Forest Road to Chapter Lake; 6 kilometres, 3 hours**

Park at the very end of the Mersey Forest Road and walk up the obvious track heading south. The full length of this track – called Moses Track – goes through to Junction Lake and is a main connector to the Walls of Jerusalem to Overland ‘Highway’. An easy 1.5-kilometre wander through regrowth forests takes you to a swing bridge over Jacksons Creek. If you walk a short distance further there is a registration book. Look around the small clearing. You will see a log with a cairn of rocks and a track beyond. This is the bottom end of Jacksons Track, where you emerge on day four.

Continue on the main track past the registration shelter. It starts to climb, passing through a strange open area, where acacias are reclaiming what would have been magnificent mountain forest devastated by fire. The track to Chapter Lake is easy to follow as it enters some of the remaining forests of grand old *Nothofagus* (Myrtle Beech). The climb is quite steep for several kilometres until it starts to merge into some scrubber

open forest and you near the top of the ridge. Head past the obvious, very large clearing with shallow depressions. The track veers continually to the right as you climb the final section on to the ridge. Ignore a cairned left-hand turn (if you spot it) and stay on the main track. This side track is the way to Junction Lake, which you will navigate to meet tomorrow. Once over the ridge you will catch glimpses of Chapter Lake as you start a short but sharp descent to the lake, back in a dark rainforest. As you near the lake, the track levels out and skirts the water's edge for a few hundred metres till you come into a shallow gully in a forest of young *Nothofagus* trees. There is room for tents here, easy access to the stream that feeds the lake, and a sunny clearing, which is a great place to cook and hang out. The impressive Grail Falls are almost immediately above and provide a soothing backdrop to your night's camp.

**DAY 2****Side trip to Cathedral Mountain, then walk to Cloister Lagoon; 13-kilometre round trip, then 3 kilometres to Cloister, 8–9 hours total**

The first half of the day is a splendid adventure up on to the sub-alpine basin that forms the Cathedral Plateau, and a climb out on to Cathedral Mountain itself. If you have ever walked the Overland Track, you will be familiar with this mountain – it is the

impressive cliff line on your left as you walk from Mt Ossa to Ducane Gap. This walk approaches from the opposite side to the cliff line you see from the Overland.

There are various tracks leading out from the campsite but it's straightforward to find the one that crosses the stream heading towards the waterfall, then veers left to avoid the cliffs. Follow the track up until it gains the top of the cliffs and emerges on to the top of the falls themselves (the rock slabs here make for a great campsite). Views start to open up out along the Mersey Valley.

From here the track goes upstream on the left bank and Pencil Pine and *Nothofagus* take over for a while. The stream itself is an absolute delight as it leaps down a rocky bed towards the falls.

Keep your eyes open for where the track crosses the stream (it is easy to miss the crossing if you're not paying attention). The track then follows the right bank of the stream, as the vegetation thins out and the lake comes into view. You pass over a low rise and find yourself in the shallow valley that holds Chalice Lake. The track is easy to follow. After you pass the lake, the track climbs towards an obvious line of taller snow gums on a rocky bluff, then slowly gains height and follows a stream for a while until you climb into the open valley that holds Tent Tarn.

These lakes were all formed by glacial action and are generally quite shallow. As you walk across the open valley, with

Tent Tarn on your left across some marshy terrain, you will see an impressive stand of old Pencil Pine in front of you. In contrast to much of this country, where bushfire has killed the Pencil Pines, this area is covered in the skeletons of snow gums, and it is the pines that have re-established a band of forest across the head of the valley. The track leads to a small and sheltered campsite in the pines.

From here the track is indistinct. Just before you enter the forest where the campsites are, look around the valley. On one side (east) is the tarn, on the other is the forest and the mountain. Straight ahead, more or less south, and at the far end of the open plain, is a rocky ridge that climbs gently towards the summit. Head in that direction until you reach the ridge itself and some obvious cairns, which mark the track.

Start climbing, following the cairns and passing through some boulder fields towards the skyline. The views really start to unfold, with Mt Rogoona coming into view – an impressive, blocky looking mountain and the peaks around the Walls of Jerusalem in the distance.

A half-hour climb will bring you to a rocky high point, and another 15 minutes gets you to the summit of Cathedral Mountain.

On a clear day, the views are incredible. You get a great perspective on Mt Ossa, Tasmania's highest peak, with bulky Pelion West beyond, and as far as Barn Bluff and Cradle Mountain. Immediately in front is the impressive ridge from Castle Crag to Mt Massif and the Ducane Range, with the Acropolis and Geryon peeking out from behind, and Mt Olympus and the Traveller Range to the south. Looking northwards and east you get the impressive skyline that is the top of the Great Western Tiers.

Retrace your outward journey and return to Chapter Lake. Allow six hours for the round trip back to camp.

The next stage, where you are once again carrying your packs, is the only real section of off-track navigation on the trip. The aim is to meet the continuation of the track from the Mersey Road to Junction Lake that you turned off the day before, without having to backtrack the way you came in.

To start this section you need to be in the thin gully where the most obvious campsites are. At the far end of the gully there is a track that heads uphill and climbs steeply towards the ridgeline. The track fades out as you leave the *Nothofagus* and emerge into a scrubby, eucalypt-dominated forest. It seems to be best to veer slightly to the right rather than directly up the hill to the top of the ridge. Follow the line of least resistance through the understorey and after about ten to 15 minutes you will meet the main Moses Creek Track. Turn right and follow this until you descend to an open valley. If you are tired or the day is wearing away, there is a nice campsite on a low grassy hill halfway along. Otherwise, another 20 minutes will



take you to the outlet of the stream to Cloister Lagoon. The area here is a mix of snow gum and pencil pine. As you glimpse the lagoon through the trees and pass to the right of a small tarn with lovely pencil pines, there is a small two-tent campsite immediately on your right. This is the best camp for the next hour's walk, so it's worth stopping here.

The section from Chapter Lake to the Lagoon will take you up to two hours.

#### DAY 3

**Cloister Lagoon to Junction Lake and Lake Myrtle, optional side trip to Mt Rogoona; 14 kilometres, roughly 6 hours, plus 4-kilometre (3-hour) trip to Mt Rogoona**

The track is mostly well-marked, although keep scanning ahead as it weaves around trees and rocks and sometimes merges with animal pads. When in doubt, a rock cairn will normally appear, but remember that this section of the track is not really maintained and sometimes multiple 'braids' appear where people have worked their way around obstacles like a fallen tree.

The first section is a real treat. After

about 20 minutes, you enter an old mixed rainforest that has the most wonderful pine and tangles of *Nothofagus*. The track is slow work as it passes along the length of the Lagoon, emerging past a grand pine (with small campsite) to the open southern end of the lagoon where small driftwood pushes in on the shallow beach.

Continue along the track through another open valley towards a low rise. From here it descends through an old forest of *Nothofagus* scattered with large boulders until you reach the bottom of a streambed. Pay attention here as the track splits. The more popular track follows the streambed for a while before entering an open grassy swale. However, you will see there is another track that climbs out of the streambed towards the right and on to the low ridge above. This is an alternative for wet weather conditions.

If you can, stay in the streambed and you will be treated to two kilometres of easy walking down a very gentle gradient as you head towards the Mayfield Plains. The landscape suddenly feels very different. After several kilometres you enter a more open area, with the Mountains of Jupiter in front of you and another valley joining

On the Cathedral plateau, near Tent Tarn.



Meston hut is the easiest of the whole trip, with undulating terrain on a well-worn track. About a half hour after passing the Rogoona Cliffs, you will reach the lovely glade where the hut is nestled. *Nothofagus* and old Pencil Pine, a small stream, and lots of grassy spots make this a great place for a late lunch or cuppa. The hut is of the same design and era as the one at Lake Junction. When you're ready to head off, walk almost to the stream just past the hut and turn left and up hill where the cairn marks the beginning of the track. We are now off the 'highway' and need to start paying attention again. Look for the cairns for where the track crosses the creek and then there is a steady climb, with occasional views across the lake until you pass again into straggly snow gum woodlands. Soon you will reach the high point on the track. From here you need to allow up to three hours for the round trip to Mt Rogoona, leaving the track at the obvious rock cairns, staying as high as you can as you climb along the ridge to the summit. This is slow travel, and mostly quite rocky and open. Once back at the packs, it is about an hour's walk through a series of shallow valleys to Lake Myrtle, where you enter an open grassy area dotted with many potential campsites near the outlet to the lake. Lake Myrtle itself is a slightly strange but very beautiful place. The cliffy profile of Mt Rogoona right above the lake makes for a spectacular spot and the camping is superb. But the place has been devastated by wildfire and almost all the Pencil Pine and Myrtle trees are gone.

the one on your left. Again, the track splits. Take the right-hand path of the fork, which continues south to Junction Lake. Just before the lake, where there is a large and very nice campsite on a slight rise, you will meet the Walls – Overland Track (the 'highway'). If you turn right here you pass by the lake, then through the famous Never Never before hitting the Overland Track. This walk takes you left, and in a few hundred metres you will find a sign, pointing to the hut, which is well worth the quick detour. This is a popular area with walkers and fishers. The hut was built in the early 1970s, and has a distinctive roof of hand-split shingles.

Walk back to the main track and turn right initially heading eastwards. The next hour's walk continues through open grassy country (the Mayfield Plains), before crossing into the forest and over a low divide. The impressive cliffs of Rogoona push down to the track as you start to follow the shoreline of Lake Meston. Sadly the track doesn't go close to the lake and this section is heavily forested. However, there are occasional vistas to the blue waters of the lake and the Mountains of Jupiter.

The section from Junction Lake to Lake

you will spot the track.

A steep descent of about one kilometre brings you to a flatter bench, where you briefly re-enter that open burnt country you passed through on day one. Follow the cairned track back into the trees, and another steeper drop into the Jacksons Creek valley. There is one section where a tangle of fallen trees turns the track into something of a jungle gym as you squeeze over, under and around the mess of trunks. The gradient stays equally steep until you are suddenly back at Jacksons Creek and emerge onto Moses Track at the registration book. Another 20 minutes and you're back at the road, with a challenging trip to some superb country under your belt, and great memories for years to come.



The stream that flows from Chalice Lake to Grail Falls

#### DAY 4

Lake Myrtle to starting point; 5 kilometres, 2 hours

The track you have taken from Lake Meston hut to Lake Myrtle is called Lake Myrtle Track on the Cathedral mapsheet and continues to Lake Bill and the Mersey Valley Road. You leave it here and pick up a lesser-known route called Jacksons Track. To find it, walk a few metres from the campsites towards Lake Bill until you reach the creek flowing from Lake Myrtle. Turn left and follow the sometimes-indistinct track marked by cairns.

This route skirts around the edge of the lake as it passes the hill marked 1088 on the Cathedral map. After about 20 minutes you descend to an open swampy area, which is clearly shown on the map, sitting between hills 1118 and 1088 just north of the lake. Some old stakes mark a faint path to some cairns on the far side, where you can pick up the track again. Descend roughly north until you enter another open plain. There is a bit of a braid in the track here. Make sure you head north across the plain to the far side, staying on the right side, until you reach the bush and

#### THE WALK AT A GLANCE

**Distance:** 41km (not including Mt Rogoona side trip)

**Time:** 4 days

**Grade:** Moderate, with sustained climbs and some rocky sections, and need for good navigation skills

**Start/finish:** Mersey Forest Road

# Hydration Packs for Day Walks

**Wild turns up the heat on 19 packs with hydration systems**



With people taking up more pastimes than ever before – many walkers are keen cyclists, for example, or participate in multisport races – there are convenience and financial benefits of having gear that crosses those boundaries. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that 15 per cent of Australians aged 15 and up, or 2.6 million people, took part in both organised and non-organised physical activities in 12 months in 2009-10. From an anecdotal point of view, I know of no one who is a pure cyclist, or bushwalker, or swimmer, or whatever. While we each might focus on one activity more than others, we do a bit of everything.

Once only part of the cyclist's world, hydration packs have branched out into other physical activities – including bushwalking – and are a classic example of cross-sport gear. There are a number of pros associated with taking a hydration reservoir on a walk rather than bottles. The reservoir sitting in line with your spine, rather than a bottle stuck on the side, means the pack is more evenly weighted, and reduces pack swing if you break out into a trot. If you're participating in a race, the time saved while drinking on the run, so to speak, can make a difference. If you're walking long distances between water supplies, having a three-litre reservoir is handy. And I find that on overnight walks, I can fill up the reservoir before going to bed and have it ready to make breakfast and a cup of tea – or maybe, depending on the number of us – first thing in the morning. Here, we've surveyed a number of hydration packs – all different – to give

you an idea of what is out there, and which might be the best for you.

## Pack cargo volume

Obviously, going on an overnight walk is going to require more cargo room than if you're heading off for a quick run. You'll see that most of the packs in this survey are suited to day walking – they have between ten and 28 litres of cargo volume and a two or three-litre reservoir.

A couple, however, can be used on longer, overnight walks as they have various straps and hooks and handles to stow gear externally.

There are a few packs for the ladies with shorter back lengths and, like many female-specific items, can be found in some shade of pink or purple.

You'll see that some packs have been designed with the cyclist in mind – they're small and aerodynamic, something that's less important to the walker. But once again, it really is about finding the right balance for your activities.

Be mindful that if the reservoir sits in the main cargo pocket, it will decrease the amount of room available for your gear.

## Hydration system

Many bag manufacturers use other brands' reservoirs and slap their name on it. For example, Source – which also makes its own packs – is the included or recommended reservoir for six of the 19 packs in this survey. Hydrapak reservoirs also go in six.

The volume of the reservoir is an important consideration, especially if

you're going for the minimalist look. A two-litre reservoir will get you through a decent day walk, whereas if you anticipate a hot day or sporadic water sources, a three-litre might be more your style. Remember, if you buy a pack designed around a two-litre reservoir it's sometimes difficult to replace it with a larger three-litre one.

The mouthpiece is another component with many features. Some have drip valves, some are bite and suck, others allow you to pressurise the reservoir so you can squirt water. Quite a few have on/off switches to avoid dribbling down your shirt, and in many cases you are able to replace the bite valve as necessary. As you can imagine, getting chomped on all day will eventually wear through the mouthpiece.

Finally, think of the amount of bacteria you have in your mouth! While many hydration systems are treated with microbial agents, it's important to empty and dry the reservoir as soon as you can. Blow as much water out of the hose as possible. To slow microbe growth, you can store most systems in the freezer – just makes sure you leave some room for the water to expand. Some reservoirs, such as the Hydrapaks, can be turned inside out and put in the dishwasher. Each brand has its own care instructions. There really are fewer things worse than a manky reservoir, hose and mouthpiece.

Each pack was tested on day walks ranging from five to seven hours in weather ranging from 25 to 29°C.

**BLACK WOLF VIPER \$99.95**

**The pack:** With 25 litres of cargo volume and weighing less than a kilogram, the Viper is made from lightweight yet sturdy material. The mouthpiece attaches to a magnet on a plastic tab that can slide up and down a strap, and the pack comes with a rain cover and emergency whistle. Adjusting the two main shoulder straps is easy, and the mesh plus lower-back-padding combo helps to air out your sweaty back. There's also a metal frame circling the back of the bag to keep its rounded rectangle shape, but it's not easily removed.

**The hydration:** The mouthpiece has a bite valve that can be turned to stem flow, even though water never comes out when you are running or climbing around. The three-litre reservoir screw top lid has a cord to keep it attached to the reservoir, and the reservoir itself is held vertical in the bag using two thin Velcro strips. The tube can be unplugged from the reservoir easily.

**COMPANION H2.0 \$49.00**

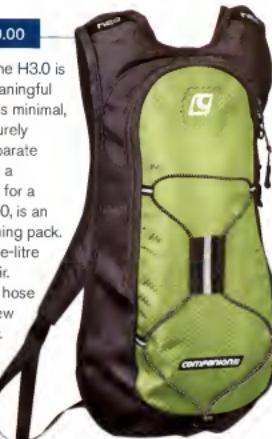
**The pack:** The cheapest on offer is also the most minimal in terms of cargo. There is barely enough for phone, keys and wallet, so you can forget about carrying any meaningful food too. It really is designed for running only. With such little cargo, it does away with a hip belt and the bag sits flat against your back.

**The hydration:** It is a bit fiddly getting the two-litre reservoir out as the hose can't be unplugged, and you have to be careful when filling it, otherwise the bag gets wet quite easily. The big screw cap is a nice way to seal the reservoir though.

**COMPANION H3.0 \$59.00**

**The pack:** Like the H2.0, the H3.0 is a little too small for any meaningful walking. Its cargo capacity is minimal, but does have room to securely stash bits and pieces in separate compartments inside. It has a big waist buckle and a spot for a helmet, and at less than \$60, is an acceptable starter trail-running pack.

**The hydration:** It's the three-litre version of the H2.0 reservoir. Again, you can't unplug the hose but the bottle cap style screw lid seals the reservoir nicely.

**DEUTER COMPACT AIR EXP 8 SL \$139.95**

**The pack:** You can tell that this bag is made for cyclists – there's a mesh cradle for a helmet, the straps are made of super-breathable mesh, and cargo is limited to eight litres. That said, it's perfectly serviceable as a day-walking pack, provided you don't pack huge amounts of food or clothing. There are two cargo pockets – one expandable – and the zips clip together, which is a nice touch. Like most, if not all, Deuter bags the women's specific Compact Air XP comes with a raincover.

**The hydration:** This bag doesn't come with a reservoir, so Deuter supplied a three-litre one from their own range. The reservoir is accessed via a side pocket and the flow from the bite tube is strong and steady, and doesn't require much sucking.

**DEUTER COMPACT AIR EXP 10 \$139.95**

**The pack:** Deeper than the Compact Air EXP 8 SL, the EXP 10 is also a cycling bag but has nice, deep pockets that easily hold a decent lunch, waterproof jacket, and all your bits and pieces. The 'airstrips cooling system' prevents back swamp and a compression zip will squish the pack down, if you want to go super minimal.

**The hydration:** See the Compact Air EXP 8.

## GEIGERRIG RIG 500 \$179.95

**The pack:** This pack is ideal for the trail runner or cyclist due to its compact size and inclusion of compression straps. There isn't a lot of room for your belongings – you can fit an MP3 device in the pack's dedicated MP3 pocket, lunch and a hardshell jacket. The pack includes a tough black plastic shield curved to conform to the shape of the wearer's back, which is removable if weight is an issue. The plastic piece is there to ensure a comfortable pack shape while the bladder is pressurised. It's noteworthy to mention that when caught in a mother of a rainstorm, the interior of the pack remained completely dry.

**The hydration:** A big selling point is the fact that the hydration system is pressurised, enabling users to take on water simply by squeezing the water nozzle. Users achieve pressure by pumping a bulb (similar to that on a blood pressure monitor) attached to one of the shoulder straps. It also has a pressure release valve if the pressure gets too much for you! Filling the two-litre reservoir involves a plastic slider, which opens the entire top seam of the bladder for easy refill and cleaning.



Best for  
CYCLING/WALKING  
MULTI-USE

## GEIGERRIG RIG 1600 \$249.95

**The pack:** A larger capacity than the Rig 500, this one has plenty of room for lunch, jacket and snacks in two large zipped cargo pockets, and has loads of straps for roll mats, sleeping bags and the like. It's certainly possible to do an overnight hut walk with this one. A padded back keeps it comfortable and off your spine, and even if you break into a trot, there's minimal pack swing.

**The hydration:** The Rig 1600 comes with a three-litre reservoir housed in its own fully zipped pocket. And just like the Rig 500, it's pressurised so you can squirt water into your mouth, your dog's mouth, or on your walking companions. The hoses are detachable for easy filling and cleaning.

## KATHMANDU KATABATIC XT \$199.98

**The pack:** The women-specific Katabatic's back length is shorter (and it's pink), and with 28 litres of cargo room, was one of the bigger bags reviewed. It reminded me of my old school bag – it's rectangular and boxy with zips running along the sides and top.

**The hydration:** The reservoir supplied by Kathmandu was donut-shaped, which is designed to reduce bulge. However, the bladder sits in a pouch within the main pocket and bulges into the cargo space anyway, reducing its capacity for other objects, and the donut shape limits the volume to two litres.



## KATHMANDU EOS XL \$119.98

**The pack:** With a hooded top, the Eos looks a lot like a shrunken hiking pack. It weighs 510 grams and with 26 litres of cargo capacity, is certainly big enough to take on an overnight trip, or load up with food for a leisurely day walk and picnic as we did. There are pole attachments and lots of straps to secure a sleeping mat or tent.

**The hydration:** The reservoir was the same as the one in the Katabatic. The hydration hose is fixed to the left shoulder strap only and there isn't anywhere to secure the valve. As a result, I walked a little water dripped out every now and again – not enough to get me wet, but small drops here and there.

**OSPREY MANTA 30 \$189.95**

**The pack:** The pack had plenty of storage space with 30 litres spread over two main compartments, plus five smaller compartments including one with scratch-resistant material and two on the hip for items to be kept close at hand. The pack also had a rain cover, trekking pole holder, helmet clip and a clip for a taillight if using at night. The lightweight breathable trampoline style harness was very comfortable and really minimised the pack swinging while running down a slippery hill.

**The hydration:** The three-litre reservoir was held in a separate rigid compartment. It was great, because the bladder did not change the volume of storage space in the main compartment, and I could fill the pack and then easily slide the reservoir in and out. The valve had a clever magnetic clip that held it on to the sternum strap, making it very quick and easy to drink. Two stand out features: First, the reservoir was semi-rigid and held its shape, and second was the handle on the bladder, making it exceptionally easy to fill.



Best for  
OVERNIGHT  
WALKS

**OSPREY VERVE 10 \$109.95**

**The pack:** With a helmet lidlock and small volume, the women's version of the men's Viper – the Verve – is another cycling pack that can be used for fast walking. The pocket at the front is just big enough to cram a waterproof jacket, and the compartmentalised main pocket has room for lunch and the bare essentials. Minimal straps have only a little padding and the hip belt, while quite thin, is easily adjusted.

**The hydration:** The adjustable bite valve has strong flow and attaches via a magnetic clip to the chest strap. A warning, however – don't use it if you have a pacemaker as the magnet is that strong. The semi-rigid reservoir is accessed via a Velcro flap on the top of the bag and is very easy to fill.

**SALOMON AGILE 12 \$129.99**

**The pack:** Very much designed for fast walking, the Agile has loops for walking poles and mesh stash pockets on the front, which I used to store my wet rain jacket. The exceptionally lightweight pack sits flush against your back and as it doesn't contain any stiffened parts, it's easy to jam bits and pieces into its 12-litre pocket and make it bulge a bit. The emergency whistle is a nice touch too.

**The hydration:** The 1.5-litre reservoir (included in the Agile) is the same as the one reviewed in the Salomon Sky 25 (below). It is more easily accessed via a zipped side pocket and has an insulated tube for cold weather. There's only a little bit of mesh between the reservoir and your back, though, and the water gets pretty warm via bodyheat.

**SALOMON SKY 25 \$139.99**

**The pack:** With 25 litres of cargo room and two side pockets for bottles, poles, and/or sleeping mat, the four-season Sky is great for a day walk and could be extended to an overnight trip. The pack does have a lot of toggles and other dangly bits hanging off it though, which I found snagged on branches when I went off-track. This pack is suitable for skiing too.

**The hydration:** The reservoir (not included with the pack) hangs on a toggle between the main compartment and the mesh padding that forms the back. The pocket is open so there's no hole for the hose but the hydrapack reservoir, while it feels soft and pliable, is also exceptionally tough. The wide opening was easy to fill and the hose is detachable. Handy.

**PLATYPUS SPRINTER XT \$189.95**

**The pack:** A relative newcomer to the Australian market, the American-owned Platypus brand is certainly making waves here. The Sprinter XT's slim lines and low weight make it perfect for a trail run but its 22-litre cargo capacity means there's plenty of room to pack lunch and camera gear if you prefer a day walk. The whole thing is weatherproof to boot.

**The hydration:** Toggles at the top of the bag secure the three-litre bladder so there's no jiggling movement if you break into a trot, and you can choose which side of your body the drinking hose sits. The bladder is housed in its own zipped pocket, and has a heavy-duty ziplock-style seal that's kept in place by a plastic fastener, complete with handle.





SOURCE WHISTLER \$164.85

Best for  
FAST WALKING

SOURCE SPINNER PRO RACE \$99.95

**The pack:** A very comfortable pack, the Spinner Pro Race has only six litres of cargo – just enough for some snacks and a few other bits and pieces, and you can jam a jacket between the front and main pockets. The thick hipbelt keeps the pack steady if you feel like a bit of running, and the back is padded so it's not sitting on your spine. The pack comes in some snazzy colours too.

**The hydration:** The three-litre reservoir, which comes included with the pack, is made from stiff blue plastic and sits comfortably in its own pocket. The wide mouth, detachable insulated hose, and handle means it's very easy to fill. Even though it is half the volume of the pack, it doesn't bulge into the valuable cargo space.



THE NORTH FACE TORRENT 12 \$199.95

**The pack:** A lightweight and comfortable ensemble that is super easy to adjust, but maybe a little too easy – it has a slight tendency to lose adjustment over time. The 12-litre volume is big enough to carry the essentials for a day walk and the pack also has a good front stash and soft media pockets for your bits and pieces. The waistband is made of thin webbing – good to keep weight down, but personally I prefer a bit more padding if I'm lugging slightly heavier loads. An emergency whistle on the chest strap and a magnet to hold the hose in place are nice touches.

**The hydration:** The mouthpiece was a bite down and suck number. Filling the three-litre Hydrapak reservoir was pretty standard fare – the top folds over and has a clamp that slides in to seal. The clamp is attached to the reservoir with a bungey cord so you don't lose it when you fill it up.



ULTRASPIRE FASTPACK \$219.95

**The pack:** Ultraspire is usually associated with hardcore trail-running types and the Fastpack (as the name suggests) is really well suited to fast walking. With a little more than 16 litres available for cargo and a heap of little pockets, you can pack a fair bit in – I managed to squeeze in a sleeping mat, food, and sleeping bag. The main pocket also tapers at the top, ensuring most of the weight stays at the bottom.

**The hydration:** This is the only hydration pack without a reservoir. Instead, the pack comes with two 770-millilitre bottles, which sit in deep side pockets. The bottles have little handles for easy grabbing but if you really want a reservoir, there's space for one in a separate compartment between the main pocket and back. The bottles fit in most bike cages too.

**ULTRASPIRE OMEGA \$189.95**

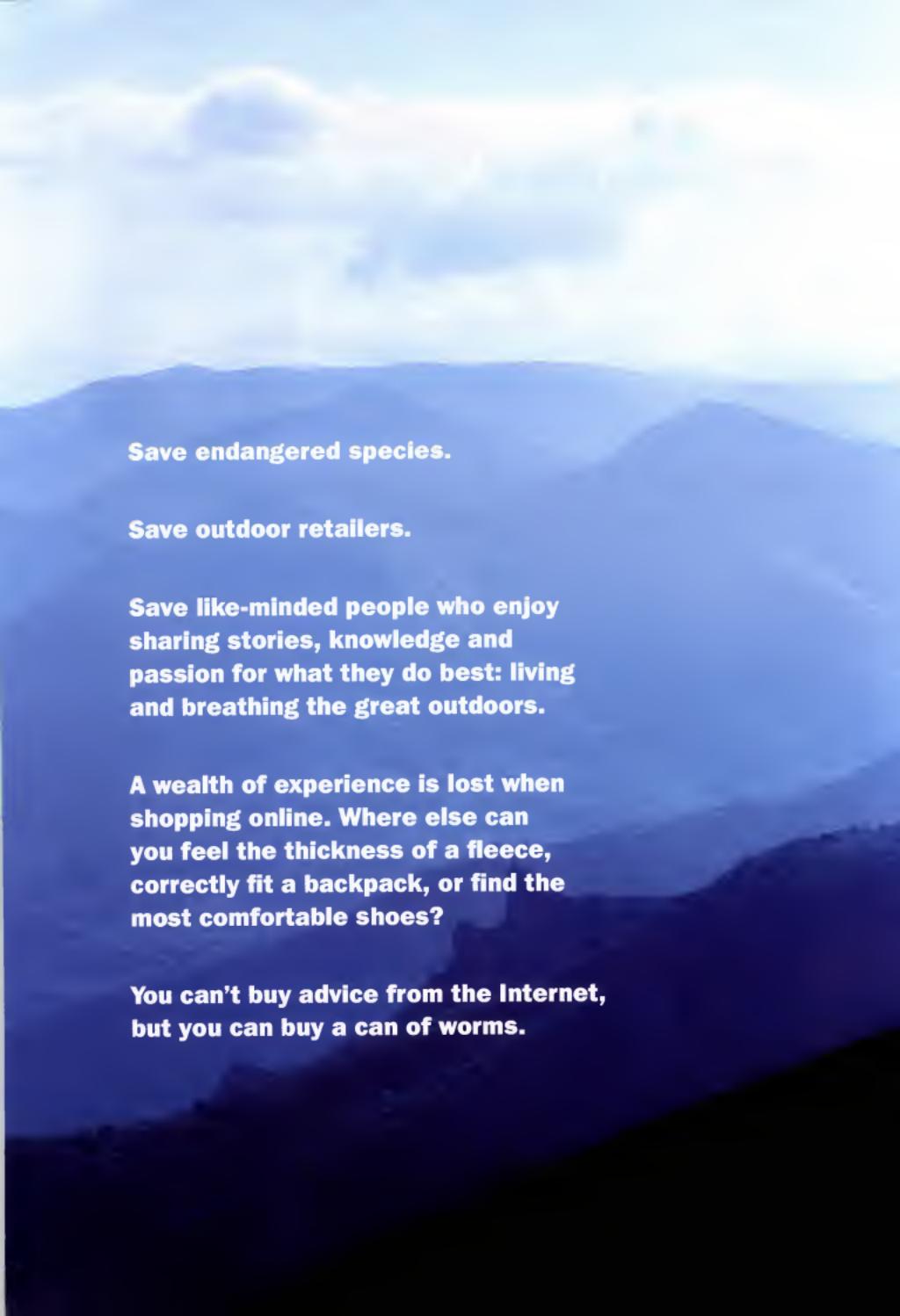
**Best for  
LIGHTWEIGHT  
RUNNING**

**The pack:** Super lightweight with a plethora of straps for easy load distribution, this one is for serious runners. While most packs have a hipbelt and chest strap, the Omega has two thinner straps across the abdomen, which, apart from being comfortable for the ladies, really anchor the pack to the body. I found myself adjusting the straps quite a bit, especially when trotting up a hill. With no stiffened parts, the pack can be scrunched up into a ball and used for side trips on multiday walks.

**The hydration:** The pack comes with a two-litre reservoir, which has a wide, easy-to-fill mouth. The plastic seal clip is attached the reservoir so there's no chance of dropping it while you're filling it up, and the Hydrapak material is deceptively tough with baffling in it so it can't bulge.



BRAND	MODEL	PACK CARGO VOLUME (L)	RESERVOIR DETAILS	RRP (AUD)
Black Wolf <a href="http://blackwolf.com.au">blackwolf.com.au</a>	Viper	25	3L Nalgene reservoir included	\$99.95
Companion <a href="http://primusaustralia.com.au">primusaustralia.com.au</a>	H2.0	0.5	2L reservoir included	\$49.00
Companion <a href="http://primusaustralia.com.au">primusaustralia.com.au</a>	H3.0	1	3L reservoir included	\$59.00
Deuter <a href="http://velovita.net.au">velovita.net.au</a>	Compact Air EXP 8 SL	8	2L Source reservoir (buy separately: \$59.95)	\$139.95
Deuter <a href="http://velovita.net.au">velovita.net.au</a>	Compact Air EXP 10	10	2L Source reservoir (buy separately: \$59.95)	\$139.95
Geigerrig <a href="http://zenimports.com.au">zenimports.com.au</a>	Rig 500	11	2L Hydrapak reservoir included	\$179.95
Geigerrig <a href="http://zenimports.com.au">zenimports.com.au</a>	Rig 1600	26	3L Hydrapak reservoir included	\$249.95
Kathmandu <a href="http://kathmandu.com.au">kathmandu.com.au</a>	Katabatic XT	28	2L Source reservoir (buy separately: \$79.98)	\$199.98
Kathmandu <a href="http://kathmandu.com.au">kathmandu.com.au</a>	Eos XL	26	2L Source reservoir (buy separately: \$79.98)	\$119.98
Osprey <a href="http://ospreypacks.com">ospreypacks.com</a>	Manta 30	30	3L Hydraform reservoir included	\$189.95
Osprey <a href="http://ospreypacks.com">ospreypacks.com</a>	Verve 10	10	3L Hydraform reservoir included	\$109.95
Platypus <a href="http://spelean.com.au">spelean.com.au</a>	Sprinter XT	22	3L Platypus reservoir included	\$189.95
Salomon <a href="http://salomon.com/au">salomon.com/au</a>	Sky 25	25	1.5L Hydrapak reservoir (buy separately: \$59.99)	\$139.99
Salomon <a href="http://salomon.com/au">salomon.com/au</a>	Agile 12	12	1.5L Hydrapak reservoir included	\$129.99
Source <a href="http://sourceoutdoor.com">sourceoutdoor.com</a>	Spinner Pro Race	6	3L Source reservoir included	\$99.95
Source <a href="http://sourceoutdoor.com">sourceoutdoor.com</a>	Whistler	15	3L Source reservoir included	\$164.95
The North Face <a href="http://thernorthface.com.au">thernorthface.com.au</a>	Torrent 12	9	3L Hydrapak reservoir included	\$199.95
UltrAspire <a href="http://barefootinc.com.au">barefootinc.com.au</a>	Fastpack	16.4	Two bottles included	\$219.95
UltrAspire <a href="http://barefootinc.com.au">barefootinc.com.au</a>	Omega	8.2	2L Hydrapak reservoir included	\$189.95



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Wild ROCK

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Burning wood to recharge your iPhone? Get real, you might think. Actually, it is – the BioLite CampStove uses an ancient approach to power up modern technology. Stuff it with twigs, pine cones, organic rubbish – whatever – and light it up and cook away. By converting heat from the fire to electricity, it does away with gas canisters, and has an internal fan to keep it burning hot. Don't use it if you're in an area with a Solid Fuel Ban or Total Fire Ban. They go for \$229.95.

[seatosummit.com.au](http://seatosummit.com.au)



## Goondie, renovated

Wild readers will be familiar with Goondie tents by **One Planet**, but now you can fit even more of your beloveds in with you with the introduction of a new three-person **Goondie 3-30D tent**. The tent has two external doors and is suitable for four-season use. The high-walled, bathtub-style floors, made from 100 denier nylon – so tough it doesn't need a footprint – and the water-repellent finished inner will keep you warm and dry. Its overall weight is 2.9 kilograms and you can buy one for yourself for \$649.00. [oneplanet.com.au](http://oneplanet.com.au)



## Ultra light, ultra warm

If you want to escape the hot hot heat of the southern hemisphere this summer and head to cooler climates, you'll need a toasty sleeping bag. The **Carinthia Airpack-Ultra sleeping bag** has no bottom fill on this bag, but has a sleeve for a full-length sleeping mat instead. This effectively halves the weight of the bag and keeps you from sliding off the mat. It has an EN rated extreme limit of -20.9°C and keeps you warm with 700 loft fill power. Grab one for \$379.95. [abenteueralpen.com.au](http://abenteueralpen.com.au)

## Protect your iGear

**E-Case** has expanded their gear to the **iSeries line of protective cases**, designed to keep all iBots and iPieces dry. Some have integrated headphone jacks, so you can continue listening to music in the wettest or dustiest conditions, and devices retain full touchscreen capabilities within. A dual-track SealLock zip closure seals itself tighter with water pressure, for full submersible protection. To protect your Nano, a case with exterior jack is \$49.95; for your iPhone, it's \$39.95 (or \$54.95 with exterior jack); and for your iPad, a case will cost you \$54.95.

[spelean.com.au](http://spelean.com.au)



## Learn your ABCs

With the ABC of information – altitude, barometer, and compass – the **Garmin Fenix GPS watch** can provide accurate elevation to track your bearings in mountainous terrain. Who hasn't been caught in a surprise rain shower at some point? With the barometer, a drop in pressure means you can be reaching for your jacket before the first drop hits the ground. The unit also wirelessly connects to a heart rate monitor, speed/cadence sensor, and external temperature gauge (all sold separately). Learn your ABCs for \$449.00.

[garmin.com.au](http://garmin.com.au)

## Handy in one hand

One-handed functionality is the catchword of the new **Leatherman One Handed Tool**. Designed to allow the user to keep one hand free for eating/drinking/killing/climbing/whatever, the multitool has 16 different tools, including spring-loaded pliers and wire cutters. It really sounds like something that would be handy around the house when not out in the field. It's just hit the shelves in Australia, and you can pick one up for \$149.95.

[leatherman.com.au](http://leatherman.com.au)





### Be safe this summer

Weighing only 153 grams and at just 11.4 centimetres tall, ACR Electronics' **ResQLink+** personal locator beacon is a tiny package that could save your life. It's buoyant, thus great for paddling, and has two fixing loops that can attach to a lifejacket or PFD. The distress signal, should you set it off, broadcasts not only where you are but also who you are. We're not sure if this is to let the rescuers decide if they want to save you or not ('Oh look, Sam's beacon's gone off but let's leave him. I never liked that guy anyway') or if it's to give them an idea of special personal circumstances (we'd like to think the latter). Be safe for \$399.00. [acartex.com](http://acartex.com)

### Multiday walks ahoy

**Mont's new Tanami pack** weighs two kilograms and is designed for lightweight bushwalking. It's mid-size, with the women's size being 50 litres, medium size, 55 litres, and large, 60 litres, and is made from canvas so it's sure to be tough. With walking pole loops, reflective trim, and a whistle on the chest strap, it's made for outdoor adventures. They come in a couple of snazzy colours and cost \$299.00. [mont.com.au](http://mont.com.au)



### Make the sun work for you

Utilise the power of the sun to boil water with the **SunRocket solar kettle**. Using an evacuated tube and reflective panels, the SunRocket can heat water in as little as 30 minutes, then close to act like a thermos. It can melt snow and boil stream or creek water if you think the source is a bit unhygienic, and it only weighs a kilogram. Great for bushwalking as well as skiing, camping, or just to have in case of emergency, they only cost \$60.00. [ibutrade.com.au](http://ibutrade.com.au)



### A headtorch and lantern in one

Snowpeak's new headlamp, the **Snowminer**, offers a high-performance headlamp that can be transformed into a hanging lantern. The soft lens can be pushed into a concave shape to focus the beam, whereas popping it out into a bulb-like shape diffuses the light evenly. The light can span 180 degrees and has a hook in the headband. With 55 hours battery life on high and 82-lumen output, it retails for \$89.95. [intertrek.com.au](http://intertrek.com.au)



### Spot the difference

The **Spot 30 daypack** from Tatonka contains a central ventilation panel and breathable cover that they say will create a pleasant air circulation on the back. Sounds good to us! Weighing less than a kilogram, the Spot 30 has a 30-litre cargo capacity and loops for walking poles, ice picks, and ropes. The expandable side compression can be used as a ski attachment. If this sounds good to you, throw one on your back for \$179.00. [osabrands.com.au](http://osabrands.com.au)



### Like a Rolling Stone

We don't promise that you'll strut like their namesake, but these new **Jagger low bushwalking shoes** are pretty cool. With a combination of leather and breathable mesh in the upper, complete with waterproof membrane, they are a lightweight option for those who don't want to let go of leather boots. The shank – the insertion between the sole and insole supporting the arch of the foot – is non-metallic, so you won't set off airport metal detectors. They come in men and women's sizes and you can grab a pair from February for \$139.99. [ecolite.net.au](http://ecolite.net.au)

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[outdoorshack.com.au](http://outdoorshack.com.au)

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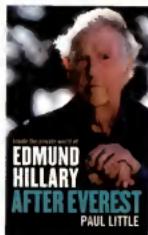
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## AFTER EVEREST: INSIDE THE PRIVATE WORLD OF EDMUND HILLARY

BY PAUL LITTLE AND CAROLYNE MENG-YEE  
(ALLEN & UNWIN, 2012, RRP \$29.99)

Many books have been written about Edmund Hillary, acknowledges latest author, Paul Little. When we approached people close to Ed and asked them to speak to us for this book, we could almost hear them silently saying to themselves at the other end of the phone: 'What – another one?' he recounts.

This one is something different.

Hillary was famous for his reserve and desire to remain humbly out of the public eye. Most of the books written about him were by his own hand. He, says Little, liked to have tight control over subject matter he deemed worthy for public discourse.

After his death in 2008, an unholy brouhaha opened up on many fronts, most famously over the attempted sale of his Rolex wristwatches by his first wife June. She intended to donate the proceeds to the Himalayan Trust. Hillary's two children Peter and Sarah protested vigorously, escalating the dispute into a tawdry and very public slanging match. Little's book goes into this sort of detail, attempting to examine what he calls 'the complex paradoxes of the man'. He tempers the scuttlebutt with swathes of more familiar Hillary-esque heroic narrative. It's an interesting read, different and no doubt fascinating. Hillary was rejoiced as a God in Nepal. Little's book takes pains to suggest he was just a normal man who just so happened to achieve something extraordinary.

Aaron Flanagan



## FIELD GUIDE TO WILDLIFE OF THE AUSTRALIAN SNOW-COUNTRY

BY KEN GREEN AND WILLIAM OSBORNE  
(New Holland, 2012, RRP \$34.95)

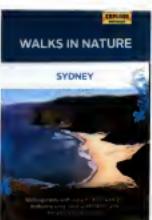
An extremely comprehensive guide to the animals that dwell in Australia's high mountainous areas, this book is the updated edition, first published in 1994. In the intervening years, the impacts of climate change, disease (such as the chytrid fungus), and natural disasters on habitats and species, are chronicled in this new edition.

The book is quite hefty, but provides identification, distribution, breeding and food information for mammals, birds, reptiles, frogs, fish, insects and

other invertebrates, as well as interesting nuggets of information ('The Broad-toothed Rat is a gentle herbivore whose algal green-tinted fur is a result of the damp locations it frequents').

It's written clearly and has plenty of photos and illustrations. Three introductory chapters outline the characteristics of the snow-country environment and the habitats of the species that live within. It's a fantastic resource for adults and children alike, as it provides loads of great information and makes identification easy and fun.

Belinda Smith



## WALKS IN NATURE: SYDNEY

BY VIOLA DESIGN

(EXPLORE AUSTRALIA, 2012, RRP \$24.95)

With 32 walks – eight per season – this deck of cards is a must-have for anyone in Sydney who likes getting out for day walks. No need to take a big map or guidebook with you – just a pocket-sized card that has all the information you need. Ranging from 7.5 to 20 kilometres, each walk has its own card with brief track notes, an easy-to-read map on the back, and a waxy water-resistant finish. They're colour-coded according to the best season to go and food stops are listed on each walk. The sturdy casing means you can throw the pack into your glove box and leave it to rattle around in there until you need it.

There are a couple of walks quite close to the city, such as a 13-kilometre return walk from Taronga Zoo to Balmoral Beach through Sydney Harbour National Park, and others scattered a little further away in the Blue Mountains. In any case, there is a walk here for any season, distance, or difficulty you want.

Belinda Smith



## UNTAMED AMERICAS

BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC  
(MADMAN, 2012, RRP \$29.95)

Here we have two discs containing three hours of American beauty. From shore to splendid shore, this series is sumptuously produced.

It's organised into four chapters: Mountains, deserts, coasts and forests. Each features cutting-edge cinematography – from high-speed digital slow motion footage to the more traditional painstaking search, wait and capture methodology.

Indeed, although the music and narration are superb, I found it a perfect background visual device – ideal to have projected or on in the background

with the sound down and music of your choice up. Epic series such as *Untamed Americas* are just good things to have at hand. It's entirely heartening to be able to watch superb but likely never seen animals gambol in spectacular remote settings and to see how far away they are, therefore less likely to be disturbed by humanity's increasingly alien habits. Documentaries such as this one remind us how important the out of sight is.

Aaron Flanagan

# John Cantor

I was born in 1985 on the Sunshine Coast. My parents are very keen travellers so growing up, we had ski holidays in New Zealand and lots of surf trips. I did some smallish hiking in NZ – only little day things, nothing huge – but when I set myself the goal of doing a solo traverse of Alaska's Brooks Range, I'd never camped in the wilderness or used a map and compass – or been alone for more than a couple of days, for the matter. I was very inexperienced and started from scratch.

The whole idea began when I read *Into the Wild* and decided I'd do something in Alaska. I completed a two-and-a-half month wilderness course with the National Outdoor Leadership School in Alaska and after that I read an article about Keith Nyitray, the first person to traverse the entire Brooks Range in one go.

My family were supportive but against the idea. They didn't want me to go but they knew I was going to go, with or without their support, so they figured they might as well jump on board. Dad, more so than Mum, did not want me going. Being a psychiatrist he analyses risk on a daily basis. In making a decision when you're emotionally invested you're not always logical, so he probably tried to remove the emotion from it so he could decide whether he really was going to try to stop me or not. He sort of did – we had arguments – but he never actively tried to stop me. He actively discouraged it without being negative. He was real about it. He's an honest man so he could only be honest with me. He took a cerebral approach to my expedition and gave me a percentage of success and a percentage of dying and so forth. It was ten per cent of dying – I won't tell you what percentage of success he gave me!

My friends were very excited and supportive but naturally after the first failed attempt, and then the second, then the third, a lot of them kind of thought I should move on. They could see the damage it was doing to me physically and psychologically so there were mixed reactions.

The biggest change I went through between the third failed attempt and this year's success was I sat down and thought, 'Right now, I can't actually traverse Brooks Range. What do I have to do to be able to do it?' It was developing the humility to really see the expedition for what it was. I had to get rid of the huge overconfident self belief that I had, that Gen-Y mentality of 'If you believe in yourself, you can achieve anything'. It's just not true. Just doing the work that was required was a massive change.

Also, I had huge problems with anxiety and panic attacks. I read about Andrew Skurka's Alaska Yukon expedition and he had a problem with the Brooks Range where he freaked out, but reading about his experiences took away the negativity with regards to my anxiety. I just realised it was a natural process and not something I needed to see as my body telling me I needed to get out of there. I needed to embrace it and keep going.

When I got to the Dalton Highway, which is halfway across the range, a pilot was supposed to drop food for me but he couldn't fly because of the weather and I ended up being stuck there two and a half days, waiting for food to arrive. I met some surveyors who were working out the back of their trailers on the side of the road and they fed me for those days, luckily. When I got to Anaktuvuk Pass, which is a village, there were people there, and at a village right near the end too, but I never saw anyone out on the trail.

All up, it was 31 days. It was meant to take two months – that was the initial plan – but I ended up setting the speed record. It wasn't intentional – I didn't know what the speed record was – and I only found out afterwards. Roman Dial, who is one of my heroes, contacted me congratulating me and saying that I'd set the speed record. Then he posted that on his own blog, which felt really great. I could've given up after the first attempt – or the second, or third.

I'm going back to the Brooks Range to try to traverse it in winter. It's never been done before, as far as I know. I'm doing it with Evan Howard and we're going in March to do a two-week training trip and then we're going to be attempting the full traverse in January 2014.

If you're interested in sponsoring John and Evan's winter traverse, please contact John at [axelcantor@gmail.com](mailto:axelcantor@gmail.com) and check [www.johncantor.com.au](http://www.johncantor.com.au) for more.





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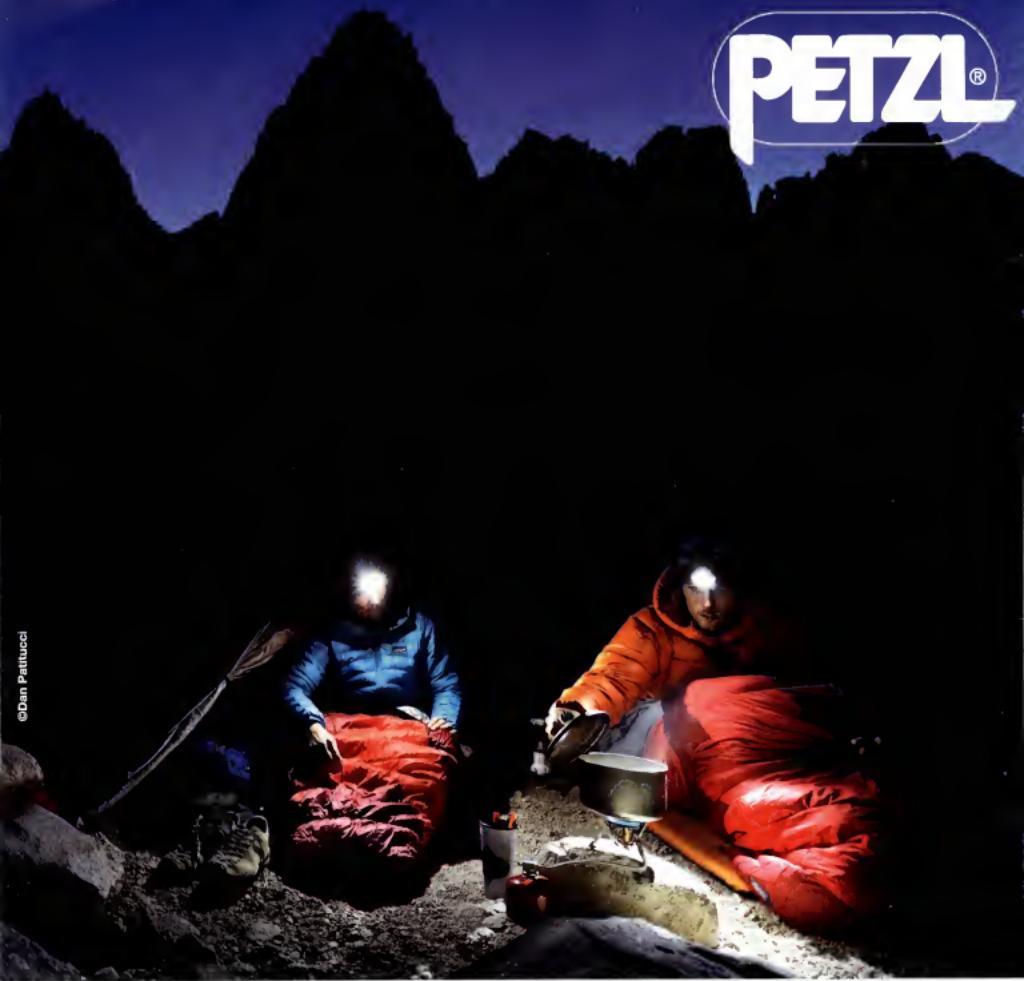
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